HRISTIAN DRAMA

SUMMER 1961

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over photograph: " The Crucifixion " (Wakefield Mysteries at the Mermaid Theatre)

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All opinions expressed in these pages are personal, and are not necessarily those of the Religious Drama Society of Great Britain.

EDITORIAL

It is often said that the Church has lost its appeal to young people. Th comparative figures of those admitted to full membership in their adolescenc and those who are still regular communicants ten years later are no encourage ment to optimism. Yet there would seem to be ages, for individuals as fc nations, when faith and obedience come most readily. Perhaps we ought no to expect too much outward piety from those who are struggling with s many conflicting emotions and experiences. Adolescence is a difficult time and essentially a lonely one in spite of the communal activities that accompan it. By too much talk about the " teenage problem " we may have tended t magnify something that is as old as mankind. Certainly the whole tendenc of advertising and popular media is to make the adolescent self-conscious and to create an inflated sense of his or her own importance. Yet becaus there is error in one direction, Christians must not turn aside and preten that there is no problem and no special needs at all. Education is the busines of all people of goodwill, not solely of the professional teacher. The influenc of example, however casual the contact may seem to be, should be stron enough to make us aware of a total responsibility. Youth Work has a hig place among the activities of R.D.S. A great deal of thought is being give to dramatic activities in schools and clubs, with the hope that a new genera tion of enthusiastic and competent actors may be trained to work in Christia drama. We have included in this issue some articles by experts in this work writing from different types of experience and looking on it in different ways Drama is more than a mode of training and religion is more than a corporat activity. These experts write with love and understanding that should hel us all to a balanced view.

Articles and letters for publication in *Christian Drama* should be sent t the Editor, c/o The Religious Drama Society, 166 Shaftesbury Avenue London, W.C. 2. Articles should preferably be typed, in double spacing Letters must be accompanied by the name and address of the sender, bu may be printed under a pseudonym if desired. Closing date for the Winte number: October 15th, 1961.

LONDON THEATRE

FRANCIS GLENDENNING

Altona ", Royal Court and Saville Theatres

Britain has no one to compare with Jean-Paul Sartre, author of *Les équestrés d'Altona*, poet, novelist, philosopher who is unmistakably rooted wartime and post-war France. His plays are a relentless probing into uman behaviour, carrying the argument far beyond the point where further evelopment seemed impossible and never failing to match the argument ith exactly appropriate mood and feeling.

Altona is a long play but it has much in common with *Huis Clos* (*In Camera*), short study of three people trapped in hell. In *Altona* the family is trapped their social position in the expanding economy of post-war Germany, by e guilt which this engenders in them, and by the guilt which clings to them om their involvement and prosperity during the Nazi regime. The play pens with the Father's attempt to hand over his " empire " to his younger n, Werner. Father is dying of throat cancer, Franz the eldest son is fficially dead. Unofficially he lives in a black attic overhead, self-imprisoned r fifteen years. Leni, his sister, ministers to him with a mixture of practical nd incestuous love. Joanna, his sister-in-law, first breaks into his strong old and later provokes him to emerge, to face his guilt and his father. Franz nen drives with his father to a double suicide. Leni climbs the attic stairs to ke on her brother's imprisonment, Joanna and Werner leave for their flat Hanover and the final word is with a tape-recorder declaiming Franz' nfession and his acceptance of responsibility for himself.

Altona demands a fair degree of intellectual and emotional stamina from ne audience but the rewards are great. For a philosopher, Sartre is a remarkble playwright. If he were a theologian he would be the Christian's answer prayer for a top-line dramatist. He has mastered the art of expressing his hilosophy in terms of genuine dramatic situations. Although it is possible discuss his plays in terms of guilt, responsibility, judgment, these themes re memorable only in terms of people: of Franz and his father, Leni, Joanna nd of their relationships with each other.

One of the side-effects of this play for the Christian is a re-examination of is own understanding of the meaning and consequences of guilt and responsiility, and a realization of the tremendous gulf between judgment in Sartre's hilosophy and judgment in Christian theology. It is a temptation to iminish the depth of the gulf and to think that if only the characters had a hristian understanding of judgment, they could free themselves from the rture of their prison. But Sartre is not to be out-thought so lightly.

This play gains in intensity from the limitation that he imposes on the notional range of his characters. They are incapable of love without anipulation and forgiveness of themselves and of each other is impossible r them. All his life the father has battened on his sons, depriving them of eir proper freedom. As a result Werner is completely dependent upon him nd Franz is completely withdrawn from him. When Franz finally emerges, is father even takes his son's guilt upon him, not in a redemptive but in a ossessive way. Franz cannot fight for his life, he has none, death is his only oice.

Sartre understands the demands of the theatre and has the power to meet hem. Not liking his philosophy is no reason for shrugging him off. *Altona* s a challenge, not to be met by " the Christian answer to *Altona* " but by a illingness to listen to and to face the issues that Sartre raises.

he Wakefield Mystery Plays. Mermaid Theatre

The Mermaid Theatre, small and intimate, is peculiarly suited to the arthiness of much of the script of the Wakefield cycle of plays, in this first ublic performance for nearly four hundred years.

Two of the most powerful moments in the play were the shepherds' pre-ntation of their gifts to the infant Jesus, and later his baptism by John. housands of shepherds each year, in cathedrals, halls and churches, repre-nted by members of Sunday Schools, Youth Fellowships and Drama roups, offer their gifts and we are moved by their simplicity and sincerity.

In the Mermaid Theatre at Puddle Dock, three professional actors bring heir gifts and offer them with a marvellous sense of the occasion. " What ould you do if Jesus came to your house? " These fifteenth-century hepherds had no hesitation in knowing what was fitting and right. A bird, ball and " a bob of cherries " are about as useless to the infant Jesus as read and wine to God but they have much the same significance. In portray-ng the shepherds, the twentieth-century actors, by the perfection of their rt, seemed to take up into their offering all the imperfections of movement nd speech and costume that we have known in our own productions.

The theatre could hardly contain the baptism scene, it was so charged with he authority of these two unique men, Jesus and John Baptist. (How ifferent the T.V. *Rock and Roll Passion Play* would have been with a real ohn instead of a religious, hands folded, stained glass type figure.) Mary oo was played with real warmth and humanity.

Today the Wakefield plays are mainly of historic and dramatic interest. heir missionary appeal does not reach our twentieth-century hearts but we ave little cause to feel superior about our unsophisticated ancestors if the est that we can produce is " *J.B.*".

' J.B." Phoenix Theatre

" *J.B.*" is a modern version of Job, written by the American poet, Archibald MacLeish. It was a great success on Broadway but London could only stand t for three weeks.

Some people, I know, found illumination and imaginative insight in ' *J.B.*" which added to their understanding of the original story. Bully for hem. For the more difficult to please there were many hazards: the language, he context, the purpose, among others.

The language fails because poetic drama of the Eliot school has lost its old on the English theatre. Also " *J.B.*" is neither American nor English ut a rather lifeless hybrid. (This is the fault of the production, not of the uthor.) In the middle of the modern English, quotations from the A.V. tick out like a sore thumb.

" *J.B.*" is a modern version of Job so we have a Thanksgiving Dinner (on tage), a car crash, an abduction and rape, an air raid which destroys J.B.'s

bank (off stage). But after the Dinner, we are not securely pegged down i history or geography and the action becomes not timeless and universal bu irrelevant. The original author of Job wrote about a particular situation i order to explore the intolerable conflict between a righteous God and th suffering of righteous men. The modern version is not sufficiently modern t make the conflict real. The lack of clarity in the context of the play con tributes to the lack of clarity in its purpose.

How safe it is to say that the playwright did not do God justice! When make negative comments about Christian plays, I sometimes wonder if I am really asking the playwright to make me a god who will hurl himself dow from the flies and *make* the audience believe. This is rightly impossible bu I wish it were not so rare to meet characters who can point to God an declare His ways. "*J.B.*" says, "I've always known that God was wit me". If he had not told me I would not have known, and because he tol me, I doubted him.

"King Kong". Princes Theatre

London has waited a long time for *King Kong*, the jazz musical with a all-African, non-white cast, to come from Johannesburg. Jack Hylton, in programme note, acknowledges his debt to the Union government for thei co-operation. But it must also be acknowledged that the delay in grantin visas to the company meant that some of the principals never reached Londo at all. This is a notable piece of irony as the story of King Kong (the nam taken by a famous Zulu prize-fighter) records his frustrated ambition to com to London. The impracticality of King Kong's manager however is sufficien to account for the frustration in this instance.

King Kong rose to fame not only for his boxing but also for his flamboyanc and braggadocio which inspired both hostility and hero worship. In a fit o temper and jealousy, he killed his girl and was sentenced to twelve years' har labour. His response to this was to drown himself. This happened only a few years ago and he was known personally to a number of the cast.

It is always difficult to portray a legendary hero and Nathan Mdledle i hampered by lack of experience in convincing the audience that King Kon is no ordinary mortal. Everything that can be done to aggrandize th character by the writing and by the production is done, but there are moment of stiffness and indecision when King Kong himself is on stage that detrac from this magnificent build-up.

Peggy Phango as the Shebeen queen had a greater confidence and assuranc in both voice and movement but even she was not entirely successful i suggesting her irresistible attraction for such a one as King Kong.

These comments may sound ungenerous to players whose opportunitie for training and experience have been fought for in conditions unimaginabl to any other company appearing in the West End. But to withhold them o to apply lower standards would be insulting and patronizing.

The quality of *King Kong* which inevitably rolls the English in the aisles i the gaiety, the exuberance, the vitality, the abandonment, the zest, the volum of sound and the vigour of movement. When one considers the Africa township life which can produce such a spirit, there is naught for our comfor but plenty for our gratitude.

An Indian South African who saw *King Kong* in Johannesburg, commented on English complaints about its lack of plot as follows: " I do not blame them, especially since they do not really know or have read about King Kong's life. To be told on the spot a few things about the ' terror of the African township ' does not help much, unless one has a vivid imagination. I think to really appreciate the play, one must know something of the conditions prevailing in the townships—e.g., the miseries in which the Africans live, the fear of the rival gangs which terrorize the people of the townships at night, the happy moments in the illegal pubs, and above all the love of music of the Africans."

All " chronicle " plays are wide open to criticism of their loose or episodic plots. *King Kong* is no exception. But the audience has its part to play, it is always called upon to make an effort of the imagination and in *King Kong* every encouragement comes across the footlights in the shape of warmth, good humour and unstinted energy. There is good rapport established between audience and players within seconds of the curtain rising and this provides the greatest stimulus to the audience's imagination.

I have written at length about *King Kong* as much for political as for religious and dramatic reasons. The arts, being no respecter of racial barriers, can be a great force for reconciliation and can combine with other liberal forces in redeeming an apparently hopeless situation. Much of the money earned by *King Kong* in South Africa went to a training centre in Johannesburg, established by the Union of Southern African Artists. The Charity Premiere in London attended by H.R.H. Princess Margaret was in aid of the *African Music and Drama Trust*, a London Trust under the presidency of the Earl of Antrim, which hopes to raise a capital sum large enough to maintain and expand the Johannesburg centre and to ensure professional standards as high as anywhere in London. (Donations and enquiries to the Honorary Secretary, African Music and Drama Trust, 140 Southwark Street, London, S.E. 1.)

It has been suggested that the naivety of this show might bring a patronizing smile to the lips of Sir Roy Welensky. It is therefore all the more important that there should be a second production by South African artists which demonstrates that they are just like other artists in their capacity to benefit from professional training.

" Waiting for Godot ". Theatre Royal, Stratford, E. 15

This production of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* by Alan Simpson was described on the posters as an " uproariously funny farce ". The producer's programme note pours scorn on the " eggheads " at the first West End production who were so busy ferreting out the philosophical meaning that they had no time to enjoy themselves.

No production of *Waiting for Godot* can ever make the play into a farce, whatever the advertisements say, and Alan Simpson's is no exception. Mrs. K. M. Baxter wrote a criticism of the original production for *Christian Drama* (Summer, 1956). Alan Simpson would have written her off as an " egghead " but her attempt to grapple with the play on several levels is infinitely more honest and appropriate than his advice, " Don't bother what it's about ". As long as we are human, we cannot help bothering.

" The Andersonville Trial ". Mermaid Theatre

Saul Levitt's play *The Andersonville Trial*, is based on a post America Civil War trial of a Confederate commandant of a P.O.W. camp in whic 14,000 prisoners died. The whole action takes place in the courtroom wher the principal parts are played by the president of the court, the judge advocate the defence counsel and the defendant.

It is well written, well played and well produced but it is inevitably dwarfe by the Eichmann and Auschwitz issues and its solutions seem relatively trite The judge advocate, after an inner struggle with himself, persuades the coun that the question of morality is legally admissible, that obedience to orders i not an adequate defence even for a soldier. With Wirz, the Commandant in the witness box, we prepare to see all his defences torn down and hi inmost motives revealed. The judge advocate certainly breaks down hi defence but cannot go much further. He shows us Wirz the kindly famili man and Wirz the callous commandant. He gets him to admit that he had conscience but was powerless to obey it. The court condemns him to death

We cannot ask Mr. Levitt to do our thinking about the Eichmann tria for us but even in the context of his own play he has given a relatively super ficial interpretation of the relation between law and morality and of the nature of human responsibility. Levitt is no Sartre but he is a dramatist and William Sylvester (Judge Advocate), William Squire (Defence Counsel) and Maurice Denham (Henry Wirz) must be grateful to him for such worthwhil parts.

" Belle ". Strand Theatre

All the admirable qualities of *Belle or the Ballad of Dr. Crippen* canno conceal (except from the eye of the promoters) that at the heart of the play is a serious error of judgment. It is an artistic as well as a moral failure to treat death as a music hall joke. The story of Crippen is not an Agatha Christie play where convention allows plot to take precedence over people.

Wolf Mankowitz and Monty Norman have done their best to keep the story within the conventions of music hall and musical comedy, but truth will out. Every time that the reality of the situation begins to break through it becomes intolerably embarrassing for the audience. The embarrassment is momentary because the authors quickly slap down the lid on reality with another bright song-and-dance routine which provides an effective escape route.

Belle has had a short run despite appeals from the stage by Mankowitz to " tell your friends ". No doubt money has been lost by the promoters and work by the actors but less injustice has been done to Crippen, his wife and Ethel le Neve.

Overheard in the foyer of the Globe Theatre, " Of course there are no good plays these days like *Robert's Wife*."

GROWING UP THROUGH DRAMA

LOUISE FORSYTH

A short time ago I received a letter from a young Guardsman now serving with his Regiment in the Far East. In it he said, " I have a book called *Poems of Our Times* and it has some of Shakespeare including ' The Quality of Mercy ' and ' Tomorrow and tomorrow ' "; and the letter ended " from your old Clown, Malcolm ". I think it might be interesting if I relate, briefly, the story of Malcolm in relation to our scheme for the teaching of Drama and Art in a school for deprived and so-called maladjusted children situated a short distance from our home in Sussex.

The school is a residential one. It caters for boys and girls who are not acceptable in an ordinary school because of behaviour difficulties or because they have some abnormality which makes them ineducable in the ordinary way. They come from all types of homes—rich and poor—and some have no homes at all and no real parents. And they come from all parts of the country, and even from overseas; in fact it would be hard to find anywhere a greater mixture of juvenile problems and temperaments under the one roof.

Our interest in the school led to our being asked if we could help in some way with Art and Drama classes—my husband being an Artist and Playwright, this was a natural request. We hadn't really the time to spare and we didn't want to be teachers in the ordinary way; but the challenge fascinated us and so we devised a scheme which had for its objective an " end of term " event in the making of which every child in our group would participate right from the beginning. We interviewed, individually, some forty boys and girls, ranging in age from eleven to sixteen, some with very low I.Qs, some bright and intelligent, all " difficult "! We formed them into six groups according to each one's potential ability or ambition. (i) The " Dreamers and Schemers ", those with ideas, whose main work would be on scripts and planning; (ii) the " Drawers and Painters ", whose talents would be developed towards scene painting and design; (iii) the " Makers and Shapers ", who would be the stage carpenters and costume makers; (iv) the " Music Makers ", who would be encouraged to provide original music for the plays; (v) the ' Players ", who would provide casts for the plays and lastly (vi) the " Acrobats ". The last group was a mistake; they proved far too boisterous for us to handle on our own and pretty soon had to be absorbed into other groups, mostly working out their kind of exhibitionism as Players!

We called our whole group " Swop and Company "—the name related to the first play to be produced—and we persuaded the school to let us use a large old Apple Loft for our Company H.Q. As this in no way resembled a classroom, and " Swop " seemed like a sort of club, we soon had more applicants than we could possibly handle, and it was not long before it was looked on as an achievement to become a member, wearing the prized insignia of a Group.

To tell the whole " Swop and Company " story would more than fill a book. I simply want to keep to Malcolm's story.

When we first met this boy at the school he was about fourteen years of age, weedy and unhealthy. He could barely read or write and was pretty

undisciplined, his psychiatric report gave a very hopeless picture, but h large, expressive brown eyes haunted us. His parents were unknown; h had been brought up by foster parents but the foster home had broken u Malcolm had got into some trouble and, through the Children's Officer of Local Authority, he was placed in our school. Although his educationa attainments were almost nil, it had been noticed at the school that he lik fooling around and imitating T.V. and Radio comedians; so, we mad Malcolm a " Player " and his first part was to be in our " Swop " pla *The Great Scrub*, the first of a series of children's plays written around a grou of Comedia Dell'Arte characters portraying, in an original way, the huma vices and virtues. Malcolm was to play the part of " Simple " a lovab tramp character who, in his simple but wise way, always rescues the oth members of Company from their troubles and errors. Malcolm's firs impression was, of course, that to be one of our Players was going to be a extension of his showing-off in some way, when he felt " in the mood ". S our first battle was to get him to rise above exhibitionism, create a characte and accept the discipline of rehearsals. Strange things began to happen. the play, " Simple " takes care of " Scrub "—a kind of a dog—the imperis able pet of the Company, played by another boy, and a rather wonderf companionship grew up between these two boys as a result of the workin out of the two characters on stage. " Simple " also becomes involved with Circus and is obliged to play the part of a Clown to get " Scrub " out of difficulty. And here was a strange coincidence; after we had chosen Malcol for this part we were told by the Principals of the school that one of h fantasies (with no foundation so far as anyone knew) was that his moth was a bare-back rider in a circus and he had always wanted to be a clown! !

Through having to master his script, Malcolm's reading was improvin and he was beginning to accept discipline and responsibility for a job th was uniquely his.

Our next big event was an Easter Play *The Road to Emmaus* which wa completed for these children in response to their pleas for " a bible play Again all the groups were engaged in their special capacities and, learnin not just for learning's sake, but to make the production inventive and origina This resulted in the drama of the Resurrection and the Supper at Emmau taking on a new and exciting meaning for them. Malcom was chosen t play " Theo ", the timid one of the two carpenters who made the Cross. was not an easy part for this boy when most of the time he was longing t strum a guitar and copy Elvis Presley and Tommy Steele. Again we had t work hard to draw out the " playing for character " instead of making h part a personality performance, but in the end he was demanding rehears and finally gave a performance of great human dignity. This is the sort thing that convinced us that one is not wrong to set very high targets for the kinds of children.

Now the request was for " Shakespeare ", and we decided to do som scenes from *Macbeth*. By now Malcolm had gained the distinction of beir our leading Player and so, of course, he played " Macbeth ". His gener health and physique had markedly improved. To understand and learn h part was not easy but this was a boy who, in little more than two years ha graduated from the simplest children's books and comics, to Shakespear

And there was now pride in his achievement. The hopeful side of teaching drama in this way to this kind of child is that through *playing* they discover themselves; from drama they discover the relationship of character to character, and through the discipline of preparing for an event which *is* going to happen, they learn a kind of informal and compulsive discipline as a member of a group.

From *Macbeth* we went on to *The Merchant of Venice* with Malcolm playing " Shylock ". But now it was not just that he was " doing Shakespeare ", this boy, in his playing, was *being* a character—*being* " Macbeth "; *being* " Shylock " and playing for original meaning. There were times when he got a bit beyond himself and when being the " leading actor " went to his head. We had to deal with that as best we could, till one day he learned his own lesson. In a sense of revolt he tried to put on a show of his own at the school, playing the old imitative cheap stuff. And suddenly he painfully realized that he had lost the taste for this—it just did not work any more. It was at that point that Malcom really " grew up ". And then, when he was a secure person, amongst his companions, and with a recognized ability, suddenly—he found his mother, *his own mother*. The Local Authority and the school had been successful in a long search and a letter arrived one day for Malcolm. He told us the news with his big brown eyes now shining—" It's like a fairy story," he said, " I've got a Mum." The fact that Mum was not a bare-back rider in a circus didn't matter at all because all that fantasy had long ago been played out and by the time Mum appeared he was a boy anyone would be proud to own, not the boy we first saw, whom nobody wanted.

The time was now coming for Malcolm's future to be decided. The acting profession had not been ruled out altogether but as he was by now well over six feet tall and still growing, by his own choice he applied for and was accepted as a Trainee Guardsman. We all had our doubts that he would get through the terribly hard initial training, but he did. When he left the school, with his popularity assured, his parting gift was a *Complete Shakespeare* which he tells us is his greatest treasure; and so our letters from the young Guardsman are a continual sort of surprise to us, that here is a proud young man and a professional soldier, with all the fun and humanity of our " old Clown ", Malcolm.

GREASEPAINT AND THE GOLDEN AGE

GRAHAM SUTER

I gather that some of the snags I have encountered in trying to get drama going in Urban Youth Clubs are by no means unique. So often we find ourselves in a small, but dramatically cold chamber, with a couple of genuine enthusiasts, one or two talented (but undependable) exhibitionists, and a very few, very shy " maybe's ". They want to start work on a cheap little comedy which looks safe for laughs but which, as any adjudicator knows, will mercilessly show up all their shortcomings. There aren't enough, even of the gentle sex, to cast it yet, although Doris did say she *might*. . . . Well, never mind; to be frank, a little time spent in genial training would not be wasted.

All the same, how is one to get a group's interest—let alone hold it—again
the infiltrations of the arctic chill and the apparently inevitable an
phenomenal level of background noise, emanating, it seems, from tab
tennis, basketball and dancing to electric guitars, all going great guns ju
outside the flimsy door? " Is it possible? " asks the minds, just a shad
insistently; ringing the changes, on the way home with: " Could we ev
put on a show? Must it be a tatty little play, even to start with? Have w
any hope of being even tolerably fit to watch? . . . Is it worth it? " Obviously
unless we are prepared, thoughtfully but undauntedly, to answer " Yes! "
the outlook is worse than black—it doesn't exist.

What is essential, of course, is to set out with realistic ideas and hope
but not with the feeling that only drudgery lies ahead, and depressing
limited possibilities.

To a great extent any hopes or chances of improvements in skill and tas
will depend upon the Leader. Given sufficient judgment and assurance
keep his group's respect and the ability to fire their imagination, he (or,
course, she) can reasonably aspire to begin to interest them in some of t
actor's necessary techniques: gradually they may cease to regard " Voi
Production " as a sneaky way of getting at their way of speaking (this is oft
a very sensitive point) and begin to find it interesting and useful. Likewi
they may in time lose their self-consciousness about movement, coming
see it as part of acting and team-work. They may even, one blessed da
realize that for most amateurs the fairly early learning of lines is essenti
so that, as actors, they can give attention to the other characters' ey
gestures and words, reacting accordingly, and giving the play truth and li

" Immediate Action " is the eternal cry, however, and of course o
cannot afford to ignore it. Fortunately the imaginative leader need not
embarrassed by it. Until a play is finally chosen, get everyone cracking wi
amusing " exercises " to interest them in the many ways in which we use o
eyes, hands, bodies. Get them to explore familiar and unfamiliar situation
comic and dramatic, and for goodness' sake do not dodge the ones they a
usually so keen to use—the flirtations, the morning-after-the-quarrel, t
interview for a job, and so on. After all, they are in such situations, especiall
flirtations, daily, and they resent older people's thinking them wholly
adequate to deal with them, just because they lack experience. It is importa
to treat such situations as very ordinary, neither exempt from nor especiall
subject to moral law. In one " cockney " club we had a lot of fun with
cinema flirtation—no end of witty lines and evidences of character; and af
that session, the group " thawed out " remarkably.

Sometimes an hour can seem endless as you wonder what on earth to
with them next, but remember that once you begin a play—and it won't
long before you have to—the weekly hour will be all too short. You
need about fifteen minutes for " exercises " first, and the rest for rehearse
In many clubs only one night per week is available, and three-quarters
an hour's rehearsal only once a week is a real poser. It is very hard to ma
and give the feeling of, real progress when rehearsals are too short and t
far apart. Somehow, it has to be done, of course.

So it's to be a kitchen farce with all stock, middle-aged characters?
perhaps a colourful " Italian " lark, milling with saucy mediterranean typ

ll passion, wit and elegance? Oh well, there are some good lines anyhow, o let's go! Don't despair: of course it's all wrong for your cast, but they re right in thinking that their audience prefer comedy, and that is a fairly ealthy taste. Your group would perhaps be better suited with a straightorward drama which they could play with sincerity, but the audience might ot respond so well, and enthusiasm might wane as a result. If you are so eckless, by the bye, as to suggest a religious play (even a racy one, even to a hurch Youth Group) don't be shocked if the resistance is unshakable. Vait. You should be getting good at that by now; and it has been known to appen, in time.

A production date is usually a nightmare, but essential. In one " new " own, the drama groups of several clubs agreed to get up a casual, intimate rama Festival. The hall chosen, the home of one of the clubs, had a udimentary stage, and was not so large as to engulf the powers of the inxperienced players. It was a case of " only friends need apply " for tickets—nd to our relief they did and comfortably filled the hall. They were attenve, appreciative and encouraging. The quality of performance was naturally ore promising than polished, but the Adjudicator realized that there are ew youthful parts in drama, and that young people cannot be wholly conincing as middle-aged characters; and whilst pointing out what could be one better next time, he found plenty to commend. There had been no ompetition, but a good deal of mutual help, and the evening was reckoned feather in the drama groups' caps.

One of the local clergy made a significant point—that this was one of the rst things to be started *and carried through* in the area. As the groups had een left to organize the whole affair, to rig up lights and sets, and soon ntirely unaided (except that the local drama society offered a little ontaneous help with props and costumes—gladly accepted), this was nother feather for their caps. It also scotched the myth that " youth " sees othing through, and that drama is quite hopeless in clubs.

Unfortunately, I could not myself " follow up " the festival, and this ighlighted an important fact. Groups need a leader who can and will ersist, over a longish period: preferably, therefore, someone living not too ar away, who can make up for rehearsals sabotaged by illness, dances and anges of jobs, and who can keep the flame alive through thick and thin oth in ample supply). It is a long-term task.

When such bold spirits are found, they often feel the need of some prearatory training—a good beginning is so important. To meet this demand, e Religious Drama Society ran a course of twelve weekly evenings in ondon last autumn, and it is now hoped to extend this work to several rovincial centres. Besides " practical " subjects like stage design, stage anagement, organizing rehearsals, work on Voice, Movement, producing ort scenes, great stress was put on imaginative exercises, aimed at giving aders ideas and a sense of dramatic values, to buttress their *judgment*, as an sential basis for fruitful handling of groups. We hope that future courses ill be as happy as the first one.

In all, then, it seems that " he who would valiant be " and lead in drama, ust not set his sights too high too soon: he must foresee a long job in fficult conditions with a group of mixed enthusiasms: he must expect to be

drained imaginatively dry on many occasions, to be confronted suddenly with indifference where he thought he had found interest; to be beset with every trial that he can imagine, and several more. If, however, he will persist, he will certainly be doing much to enlarge the imaginative and perceptive powers of the group; he might even, at last, produce a decent play and some really useful actors. If the group trust and like him very much, he might one day get round to putting on a really lively bit of religious drama—to the advantage of religious drama as well as of the players.

DRAMA WITH YOUNG PEOPLE IN RURAL AREAS

F. DEREK BOWSKILL

By far the biggest problem which has to be overcome is one of distance. Where there is a very scattered population—isolated cottages, hamlets and small villages looking to small market towns—with a severe shortage of public transport, not only is there difficulty in gathering together for rehearsal and performance in any case, but these gatherings are bound to be of minimum numbers of the mainly inexperienced, since opportunities for present practice and past experience are strictly limited.

The rural Youth Club meets at the most twice a week and the standard problems of shortage of time, space and leaders are therefore exacerbated. In these cases, all the normal activities of a Club must be accommodated in one place and at one time. Since Drama and, say, Table Tennis, Dancing or Boxing are, under these conditions, mutually exclusive, and already converted Drama fans small in number, there appear to be two alternatives for Drama in Youth Clubs: either to ask the non-participants to watch in patient quietude or to enrol all the club members into the play. The first will bring about angry frustrations and the second a loss of goodwill and artistic achievement.

To these " practical difficulties " must be added others:

The antagonism of many young people to the largely-practised " theatre of the fuddy-duddies ". There is something in the claim that the left-overs of the Theatre of the 1930's have no place in the swiftly changing climate of the 1960's. There is little in plays of insignificant form and minimal content—devoted to the carefully ordered lives of squires' wives, fly-fishing, paying-guests or contrived extra-marital situations in Mayfair flats—which has much inspired relevance to a young person born in the shadow of global warfare. The first taste of Theatre for many young people has therefore been the last.

This lack of a fired example where most needed is backed up by a wilful refusal on the part of many adult groups, while calling out for " young blood " on the one hand, to treat their young members as anything more than easily replaced supernumeraries. Constantly to be asked to do no more than deliver posters, sell tickets and programmes, make coffee and arrange uncomfortable seats in straight lines, is no real alternative to the thrill of

practical creative theatre, and will surely kill the enthusiasm of even the most devoted. Not only are these attitudes failing to attract young people but they are positively driving them away.

However, these obstacles are not so severe as those brought about by the untimely introduction of completely unsuited plays. The ability to read aloud with any degree of competence is not a universal one and when this is coupled with the fact that most " plays for young people " are in fact written by weak-minded adults for even weaker-minded audiences the results can easily be imagined. Unhappily there appears to be an embargo placed by the dead hand of adult authority on any play or dramatic activity which deals with a serious theme in any but the most facile way. The climate of authority in too many Youth Clubs, especially the more remote ones, will hardly allow of such plays as *The Sport of My Mad Mother*, *A Taste of Honey*, *The Making of Moo*, even being mentioned, let alone considered for presentation. This is surely unfortunate.

Young people require their drama to reflect their own enquiries into the nature of life, death, sex and resurrection. Its content must be compelling and urgent and its form contemporary and exciting.

A history of class distinction has bedevilled the amateur theatre, postulating that there is something quite different about those who " do drama " from those who do not. This has consolidated the present social stratification of culture which is playing havoc with the arts in this country. With young people especially it is essential that it be made abundantly clear that theatre is open to everyone on equal terms. If invalid literary overtones are excluded, the thrill of creation, which stimulates on its own account, will be seen to have an universal appeal.

In overcoming these problems it must be demonstrated that drama can offer thrills, excitements and " kicks " more than competitive with the juke-box or jive; wrestling or rock-climbing. At the same time there must be a strict dedication to the highest standards from the word " go ". The low standards prevailing in " Youth Club Drama " simply fight against increased enrolment.

Theatre is a basic human activity, and an approach with young people most likely to succeed is one which accepts the fact that Theatre is very much tied up with the imaginative play of the young child. This play is a necessary part of life and the child will seize every opportunity for it. Provided these urges have been followed out there will be no problem of the wrong kind of self-consciousness arising at any age. There is, however, no point in encouraging those who have been denied these opportunities a new, specialized and very sophisticated activity at a time when they are most unlikely to respond. Between the ages of 12–18 it is extremely difficult to start " performing in public " and even more difficult to release sincere, personal emotions when surrounded by friends and club members.

One answer is to provide drama groups for the 7 to 12 and 13 to 18 age ranges—the younger group consolidating its not quite lost tendencies for creative, imaginative activity and the older group approaching the disciplines of artistic form. Thus the work would move from personal experience and expression to artistic communication, allowing the latter to grow naturally from the former. Such groups would form a link between schools and youth

clubs and between youth clubs and adult groups, offering a continuou development. It would appear that, in rural areas especially, the answer ma well lie with these Area Drama Groups rather than with Drama in Youth Clubs.

The work should appeal to young peoples' instinct for exciting, stimulatin expansion; be it in the form of making films, radio plays, Dance Drama Improvization, Interpreting Jazz Records, writing plays or even producin the one-act play.

It is suggested that drama should be done for its own sake only—for th thrills and kicks that will surely come—and not for club funds or deservin charities (most unhappy umbrellas for theatre these). If financial difficultie stand in the way, and they ought not do so frequently, then Local Authoritie and Trusts must be relentlessly pursued until the necessary assistance i forthcoming.

When the productions have come to fruition, it is possible for them to b toured and performed in open cars and trailers; from caravans and o portable rostrums. They can be presented by local arrangement or not The group can descend into public places and begin to set up. In the village word soon gets around and a small crowd will quickly assemble, if only t satisfy its curiosity. All that is required is that the group shall have somethin worthwhile to present, be able to do it well and make a strong initial impact This is the sort of challenge to which young people readily respond. Village greens, Market places, Youth Clubs, Hospitals, Schools, Cafés, Hotels Boxing Tournaments, Dance Halls and Churches are all possible " theatres " The method of presentation should be as exciting as the content. The hug task is, in a theatreless area, to arouse audience interest generally and conver others to an enthusiastic wish to take part. It is difficult to imagine a mor thrilling project than to perform a short drama about the " rigging " o boxing matches, on a boxing ring, to the spectators, between fights. Don but shortly done, with imagination, the impact, communication and achieve ment can be exhilarating. Similarly, with a piece devoted to one aspect o the colour and race problem—a telling improvization in the context of related sermon can be most satisfying.

Not only to tour these productions, but also to invite the audience to discus the piece and its execution with the cast can be most worthwhile, especiall when players and audience are contemporaries. If the players can tempt o goad the audience into being honestly critical then youthful sparks begin t fly—but to a purpose.

In rural areas especially there are very few stages of any kind, let alon good ones. If, therefore, in village halls, clubrooms, hospitals or churche the group can get away from mock proscenium arches and trestle-tables an consider the whole space as a stage, then the resulting work can be as excitin as it is flexible. With an imaginative use of lighting and music the ver architecture, or lack of it, can be, as it ought, an integral, dynamic part of th presentation. It is sad that so few groups pay serious attention to lightin and music, since the intensive use of these with or without rostrums and th corresponding playing down of the importance of the spoken word wil appeal quickly to young people, firing their enthusiasm and imagination.

Drama must shortly show its thrills and excitements—otherwise the potential convert will be lost to the more immediate charms of the juke-box. It is here, surely, that the place of improvization and the impact of music and lighting can properly be assessed.

Once the unique, electric thrill of a dramatic experience has been shared there is hardly a living soul who will not go to endless lengths to recapture it. A taste of the potential joy of the end-product must be offered straightway. After this, the difficulties of transport, distance, low numbers, insufficient space and inadequate facilities no longer play a serious part.

The urgent need, in Town or Country, is to find the inspired individual who can make the claims of Drama live with a burning flame. There is no other way. . Here is the key.

THE YOUTH THEATRE

DAVID FOURNEL

The Aims of the Youth Theatre

The Youth Theatre was founded in September 1956, by Michael Croft; its twin aims are to encourage young people to appreciate good theatre and to offer them the challenging and disciplined team-work of taking part in a big production.

We do not necessarily choose the best actors available, but we try to select those who seem likely to give most to the work and to gain most from it. Actors are selected on the basis of audition and interview, and we regard both as equally important. So far, the Youth Theatre casts have been drawn mainly from Public and Grammar Schools, but we hope that in the future, all Secondary schools will take an increasing interest in our work.

The lower age limit is fifteen and the upper twenty-one (with concessions for those who have been on National Serivce). Young people who have left school are encouraged to take an active part in the various departments of production as far as their working hours will permit.

We do not attempt to turn out young professionals, although we do our best to help members who cannot be discouraged from following a stage career.

The history of the Youth Theatre

The first Youth Theatre production was *Henry V*, and was staged at Toynbee Hall, Aldgate East, with a Company of boys drawn largely from Alleyn's School, Dulwich, where Mr. Croft had formerly produced the school plays.

In April 1957 we returned to Aldgate with *Henry IV Part II*, with a cast drawn mainly from Alleyn's, but eight other London schools were represented. This production included a special schools' matinee, preceded by a talk from the producer on the problems of staging the play.

We took this production to Manchester in September of the same year, where it played for a week at the University theatre. Although many Manchester boys gave a hand with walk-on parts and publicity work, the visit was

perhaps our darkest, not to say our wettest hour. Those who survived look back four years later with the memory of playing to empty rows and parading in costume through the city in an attempt to whip up support.

In August 1959, drawing from fifteen London schools, we performed *Troilus and Cressida* at the Edinburgh Festival. If we did not arouse much interest amongst Festival-goers, at least we received the blessing of Professor Dover Wilson—and that was worth going a long way for. We brought the production to London for a short season at the Lyric, Hammersmith.

In 1959 was a different story. We received an invitation to Dartington Hall, Devon, where we spent three weeks in April rehearsing *Hamlet*. Thanks to the enthusiasm of Mrs. Dorothy Elmhirst and Tennents Productions Ltd. we were offered a chance to appear in the West End. We presented *Hamlet* at the Queen's theatre during August Bank Holiday week. For the first time, despite the heat-wave and a printing dispute which knocked our advance publicity on the head, the Youth Theatre managed to emerge with a profit. Later we took the production for a week to the Arts Theatre, Cambridge, and then had three weeks at the Lyric, Hammersmith.

The success of this production led to a number of invitations abroad. We were invited to take it on a tour of Holland at Easter 1960. We gave sixteen performances in nine different towns, and then had the honour of being the first non-professional Company to represent Britain at the Paris Festival with three performances at the Sarah Bernhardt Theatre. Because of school commitments the visit had to be arranged at a weekend, which meant leaving London Airport at mid-day on Saturday and arriving back at 5 a.m. on the following Monday. The trip almost came to grief before it started when the transport for the costume skips failed to arrive. By a mere stroke of luck one of the Company managed to stop a passing lorry and persuaded the driver to take the skips from Euston to the Airport. Despite this early set back the production was given standing ovations by the enthusiastic Parisians.

In 1960 we recruited widely from all over England, girls this time as well as boys, for a modern dress production of *Julius Caesar*, once again at the Queen's theatre. The play was well received but not so well attended; the modern dress kept even some of our regular supporters away.

This production was seen by representatives of the Teatro Club of Rome. They invited us to undertake a tour of Italy which resulted in bizarre and sometimes unbelievable episodes.

Our tentative plans for this Summer are a short season consisting of a repertory of *Richard II*, *Troilus and Cressida* and perhaps one other play. We start work on these productions mid-July and hope to have a West End theatre again.

Following our Summer Season we have been invited to represent Great Britain, with *Julius Caesar*, at the West Berlin International Festival in September. We are again the first non-professional Company to be invited to the Festival, and the first British Group for two years.

Permanent Headquarters

The Youth Theatre was kept going in its early days by voluntary donations and production profits (although generally the donations had to offset production losses). Now, with a generous grant from the Ministry of Education

towards capital expenditure and running costs, together with a grant from the King George's Jubilee Trust, and a further £500 a year from two private supporters, the Misses Veevers of Southport, the Youth Theatre has opened its headquarters in a ground floor flat in Eccleston Square. The premises consist of an office, clubroom, canteen and study, so we are now able to carry out a more varied and extensive programme. Plans for the future include regular meetings at the headquarters, discussions, play-readings, and the encouragement of Youth Theatre groups outside London.

However, our ultimate aim is to establish a permanent Centre with workshops, rehearsal rooms, and a small theatre in which young people can put on their own productions, and young writers and designers can try out their ideas.

Recruitment

Every year we hold auditions, both in Manchester and London for new recruits. The type of boy or girl Mr. Croft looks for is the hardest to find. They may have never acted before in their life and maybe can't act anyway, but they must have something to give—some kind of personality, vitality, a spark, a freshness, a simplicity—a hint of talent perhaps—qualities you can't pinpoint until you see them. They may be too timid to apply, and may be tucked away in the school football or netball team and think that acting is too " arty " for them. They may have passed unnoticed by the school producer because they can't speak correctly or look the type; maybe their school doesn't do plays anyway; or maybe they are just anti-school and antigroups of any kind. These are some of the " types " who started the Youth Theatre off five years ago. They have been its main justification ever since. But now it is established its trickiest problems is going to be to find them at all.

Nativity Plays

Come and Behold Him
He Came Unto His Own *by* VERA G. CUMBERLEGE
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The first of these plays, which lasts 45 minutes, is a simple yet moving presentation of the Nativity. Carols, for which the music is provided, form an integral part, and are mostly sung by a hidden choir. There are helpful suggestions on production.

The second portrays the purpose of God from the Creation and Fall to the Resurrection, and the life of the Church. Notes on production and music are included.

Five Plays for Christmas *by* DAPHNE JOHNSON
3*s.* 6*d. net*

These plays represent five ways, using both mime and dialogue, in which the basic theme of the Birth of Christ can be worked out by a producer with a group of unskilled actors.

The Prince of Peace *by* V. D. PEARETH 2*s.* 6*d. net*

'The author has succeeded admirably, following the biblical narrative from the Annunciation to the Flight into Egypt.' *Church Times.*

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SALVATION ARMY NATIONAL DRAMA FESTIVAL

B. R. JANSEN

For some time now there has been considerable interest among sections of the Salvation Army on the possibility of introducing religious drama as a serious and effective means of evangelism. On Saturday, May 27th, 1961, the first official steps towards a realization of that hope were taken when, as part of the National Youth Day, a festival of drama was held at the Portcullis Theatre in Westminster. Local activity has been in evidence for sometime and the southern area finalist—Southsea, represented the south, Rushden, the Midlands and Manchester Temple, the north, each presenting a one-act play under normal festival conditions. Mrs. P. Reader of Leigh-on-Sea acted as adjudicator.

The three plays were in interesting contrast to each other. Southsea had chosen a period-play *Isolation at Eyam* by Joyce Denys, set in 1665, with an all-female cast. Rushden's play was written by one of the players, Mr. R. W. Hill, who had previously won the Society's play competition with his play *The Dark Night*. Set in an advertising agency, his new play, *My Beginning*, dealt with the artificiality of modern life and brought the audience to a vital moment of decision. The third play, *The Gentle Rain* by Anthony Booth, presented by the Manchester Temple Players was set in a country vicarage and told of the clash of moral and religious loyalties which arose within the vicar's family when a convict " on-the-run " asks for shelter.

It was of course impossible for the groups to bring any scenery or props with them, apart from very small items, but fortunately the Portcullis Theatre is well provided and everyone managed to find enough to satisfy their requirements. Despite the fact that the time allowed to set the stage was limited to ten minutes, all three groups attained quite a high standard of stage setting, though Manchester earned highest praise from the adjudicator. Perhaps the bold use of the " flats " was the reason for this.

In her adjudication, Mrs. P. Reader praised the high standard of speech and acting reached by all three groups. She felt that religious drama of this kind could do much to add force to the Christian message and recommended to us the Religious Drama Society as a source of information and help. Getting down to the finer details about the individual plays and players, her detailed criticism was constructive and helpful. Her marks had been allotted for various aspects including choice of play; stage setting; dramatic effect as well as production and acting. Her chief concern was, however, with naturalness of performance and for this reason she gave her decision to Manchester who, she felt, had attained a level for which all groups should aim. The other two plays, though having many good points, tended to be a little laboured. This may be partly due to staleness creeping into performances which have to be repeated, not on successive nights when the tension and atmosphere can be maintained in the performance, but at intervals of several weeks. Manchester was presenting *The Gentle Rain* for the first time and it flowed along, gaining in dramatic effect all the time and holding the

attention throughout. Good casting, said Mrs. Reader, was one of the reasons for this—another was the skilful use of the dramatic pauses which abound in this play. It is one of the few one-act plays in which real characters play out an intensely dramatic yet realistic situation. So well are each of the six characters drawn, that they virtually " play " themselves. Nevertheless, a great deal of work had gone into the production of the play.

Everyone agreed that the festival had been a great success and it is hoped that it will now become a permanent annual feature, growing in scale each year as more groups are formed within the local corps. Greater support must now be given at these local levels and new ventures are already being discussed. A party of university graduates and undergraduates are considering " trekking " with a mobile theatre during the summer vacation in 1962.

These plans serve to show that the Salvation Army, whilst retaining some of the more traditional methods of evangelism in the open air, is prepared to own that new methods are required in a new society.

" MY BROTHER'S KEEPER "

HAROLD HOBSON

I will not say that the Theatre Group Productions recital given by Sylvia Read and William Fry, directed by Martin Browne, at the Festival Hall on Friday, was exciting; I will only say that it excited *me*. I went to it out of a sense of duty, and I stayed for delight. The *montage* of the programme called *My Brother's Keeper* was subtle. Practically every item ranging from the Authorized Version of the Bible to Betjeman, Jennings and Nash raised the power of every other item through the skill of its placing.

Neither the story of Maria Pilenko nor the prayer of St. Francis, which ended the programme, is in itself distinguished for thought or expression. But put together they were of a pathos and indeed an illumination which were exquisitely moving. At times mannered, and at times very simple, Miss Read and Mr. Fry, though honourably defeated by an impossible extract from *Brand*, brought off effects which pierced the marrow like a thin, clean sword.

—by kind permission of the *Sunday Times*.

" CASEY "

(Reprinted from the *Crawley Courier* by their kind permission)

A remarkable event not only in the annals of British theatre, but also in the religious life of twentieth-century Britain, took place in Crawley this week (March 17th–21st, 1961).

This event, which I predict will produce eventual ripples of interest, shock and controversy far beyond the confines of this new town, was the birth of a new passion play.

Written by Philip Turner, popular, hard-hitting Anglican priest at St. Peter's, who is more widely known on both sides of the Atlantic as a controversial Christian playwright, it is an immensely courageous attempt to

portray Calvary as the " still point of the turning world " in this tortured century of doubt, devastation and near despair.

In the playwright's bitter words, it describes " a dying Christ, a dying Church "—or if you prefer—" a dirty joke about a universe without a God".

Three centuries ago the playwright-priest would have been burned at the stake for blasphemous heresy; a mere three generations earlier, and this powerful, tortured production would have been howled off any stage by the outraged, sanctimonious Blimps of their day.

This is *not* a dramatic masterpiece—indeed the author himself describes it as " a meditation on the Passion of Christ "—but it has a pulsating challenge which almost compensates, and which will surely ensure it a long, and far from inglorious career.

Any skilled dramatic critic would find it child's play to poke a pedant's pen through several serious dramatic flaws, both in text and production, but in doing so, like every pedant, they would merely be pulling the petals off a living miracle which, endowed with its own mysterious life, survives the scalpel of mere academic analysis.

Although both theatre and church may one day record for posterity that Philip Turner's Passion play was given its first performance by a young Australian producer, Donald Mackay, in St. Peter's Hall, West Green, Crawley, on Friday, March 17th, the rightful " home " of this play is a cathedral.

Some amongst us may live to see that take place, if not at Chichester in our own bishopric, perhaps at neighbouring Southwark, around whose ancient walls the winds of change at present blow freely. It will come to pass because all churches must face up to living challenge, and the foe at which *Casey* tilts with Don Quixotic zest is today's Golgothas which indeed survive not only in Crawley's New Town, but wherever suffering humanity congregates.

Starring his " text " with biting lyric-satires, adapted to the varying rhythms of popular war ditties, traditional folk songs and negro spirituals, Turner has eloquently sought to depict, against the backcloth of living Calvary, modern dilemmas—the blind cruelty of the cheerful agnostic, as well as the agony of dedicated priests forlornly seeking to bridge the nigh impassable gulfs which today increasingly separate a cynical laity and a dogma-ridden church.

The playwright, pressing both time and history into his service as evocative witnesses of man's eternally recurring tragedies, has conceived the brilliant inspiration of enacting Christ's crucifixion against the grey backcloth of today.

Brilliantly illustrative both of the playwright's artistic vision and the priest's acknowledgement of modern impasses, he has chosen as the play's amoral " hero " Casey, a British Tommy.

Many conventional churchgoers are likely to find *Casey* tough to take, for the challenge to empty churches is voiced from *within* the camp. But if *Casey* can be given a wider audience—particularly amongst sceptical teenagers and the questing " twenties "—the challenge may elicit a heartening response.

Whether or not there will be general agreement that a Passion play has been born, there can be no doubt that a controversy has been launched.

A. D.

GARCIA LORCA: A SPANISH TRAGEDY

DENNIS HARRISON

During the inter-war years, the cultural life of Europe underwent as radical a change as the social and political world it reflected. The skin deep realism which had dominated much of art and literature was already giving way to the abstractions of the artist and the " stream of consciousness " of the writer.

The Naturalism which had furnished the theatre with all the superficial resemblances of reality no longer satisfied the dramatist. In France André Obey and Jean Cocteau, two among many, were replacing the social realism of Zola with their own conceptions of reality. In Italy Pirandello was ringing the changes of " slice of life " drama in the faces of his audience, whilst in Germany everything had evaporated into the subjective delirium of Expressionism. In Spain the *avant-garde* consisted of a very small group among whom were Manuel de Falla, Salvador Dali and Federico Garcia Lorca who may be said to have represented music, painting and literature. The Catalan Picasso had already struck out his own path in Paris.

Born in 1898, Fedrico Garcia Lorca came to maturity as a dramatic poet during the critical thirties that were to end in the holocaust that was to engulf his country and cost him his life. During the fifteen years before his death in 1936 Lorca wrote about a dozen comedies and tragedies that reveal the workings of a unique dramatic imagination. This imaginative quality is apparent in his earliest work and the signature of his particular genius is indelible in all his plays. In one of his early pieces, *The Witchery of the Butterfly*, a colony of cockroaches is startled by the appearance of a butterfly from the outside world whose kind had never been seen before. Is this wondrous apparition a thing of good or ill omen? One cockroach is so fascinated by the creature that he falls into conversation with her and learns of the beauties of the world from which she comes. When the butterfly at last leaves, the cockroach attempts to fly off as well, but in vain. Frustrated and bitter, he knows that he will never be contented with his lot again.

This aptitude for allegory and fantasy reappears in his later work such as in the Expressionist play *When Five Years Pass* where the characters appear as types like the Young Man, the Child and the Betrothed, as well as in his Surrealist play *Don Perlimplin.*

Don Perlimplin is an ageing scholar who is suddenly and surprisingly persuaded to marry Belisa, his beautiful and seductive neighbour. He himself is dressed in a green cassock and white wig in a setting no less colourful consisting of a huge bed, a canopy, soft cushions and all the finery of a voluptuous setting. Six doors lead from the room opening on a balcony from which are suspended five ladders. The whole scene, it is insisted, should be out of perspective, its queerness a visual counterpart to the strange tale of a man who, made to play the cuckold, impersonates his own rival and stabs himself, before the amazed Belisa.

However startling his experiments, Lorca is nothing if not Spanish in inspiration. His themes and characters were first and foremost of his native environment whatever their dramatic transformation. Those who peopled his stage came from the bourgeois homes of Madrid or from the peasant caves

outside his own Granada. In 1930 Madrid saw the comedy of *The Wonderful Wife of the Shoemaker* in which Lorca reveals himself as a folk dramatist. Three years later in the same city was produced one of his greatest folk tragedies *Blood Wedding* in which are fused the experimental and traditional elements of his dramaturgy. So well is Lorca's versatility represented by *Blood Wedding* that a consideration of this play alone is sufficient introduction to his work.

The story is of an old family vendetta in which a woman has lost her husband and elder son. She gives her surviving son in marriage to the only daughter of a widower whose greed for land is matched by the mother's eagerness for the survival of her family through her son. It transpires that the girl has been attracted for some time to a certain Leonardo. Both have long tried to forget their passion for each other, Leonardo by his marriage of some time before, she by her betrothal to the widow's son. Leonardo is one of the guests at the wedding. His meeting with the bride awakens their attraction for each other and they elope.

" Two groups. There are two groups here
My family and yours," says the mother.
" The hour of blood has struck again."

The families divide and the bridegroom goes after the couple with the whole village also in pursuit of them. The play ends with the mutual murder of the groom and Leonardo.

Such is the story, based on nothing more than a newspaper item. Yet out of its simple situation grew one of the very few unquestionable tragedies of the modern stage. After a long period of " gestation " Lorca took little more than a week to write the final draft. To read *Blood Wedding* is to experience the full impact of Lorca both as poet and dramatist, although it is difficult to separate the two in this play. As a dramatist he spoke like a poet, as a poet he spoke like a dramatist. The overall impression of rich lyricism, dramatic intensity and the fateful conception informing the whole tragedy gives to this work a certain Euripidean feeling.

The mother's first words in the play set the emotional key. To her son's request for a knife to cut the vine her reply rings out: " Knives, knives, Cursed be all knives and the scoundrel who invented them. . . ." And to the son's protest she continues: " If I lived to be a hundred I'd talk of nothing else. First your father . . . then your brother. Oh is it right—how can it be—that a small thing like a knife or a pistol can finish off a man."

The lullaby of the next scene sung over a sleeping child, Leonardo's child, though in the rhythm of a simple folk verse, maintains the same key.

" Sing lullaby, baby,
About the great horse
Who would not drink water,
So black was its course."

And the shadow grows deeper with the lines

" His mane is frozen
His hurt hoofs stagger,
Between his eyes
Is a silver dagger."[1]

[1] trans. Roy Campbell *Lorca* (Bowes and Bowes).

Lorca's ear for the natural speech rhythms of his people was matched by the strong sense of colour and design with which he conceived his settings. How completely he had visualized the staging of *Blood Wedding* is apparent from his directions at the head of each scene.

In the first scene we have the simple description: "A room painted yellow", in the second: "A room painted rose". For the final scene "A white dwelling" is indicated with arches and thick walls. To the right and left, are white steps. At the back, a great arch and a wall of the same colour. The floor also should be shining white. This simple dwelling should have the monumental feeling of a church. There should not be a single grey nor any shadow, not even what is necessary for perspective."

Equal to Lorca's visual imagination was a musical ability which won him the admiration of de Falla who considered him his most promising pupil. This, like his other gifts, however, was dedicated to a poetic and dramatic vocation, and apart from the musical settings to his lyrics in and out of his plays, a musical quality permeates much of his dramatic writing.

Edwin Honig in his book on Lorca points to the subtle thematic organization of certain plays which seems based on musical rather than dramatic patterns. Nowhere is this quality more apparent than in *Blood Wedding*. It is perhaps natural that a play so close to the atmosphere of the music and movement of Greek Tragedy should have a strong musical dimension. The lyric scenes interspersing those of action are reminiscent of the alternating scenes of chorus and dialogue of the Attic dramatists.

In *Blood Wedding* Lorca has recourse to both ancient and contemporary forms in his attempt to give timeless significance to a local and passing incident in the lives of his peasants. His characters are introduced as types rather than individuals, a device from the Expressionist Theatre he had already used in *When Five Years Pass*. Thus there is the Mother, the Bride, the Bridegroom, the Wife, etc. At first there is little to suggest in the characterization and dialogue that these people have anything more than their individual lives to lead. Imperceptibly, however, the atmosphere is transformed, so that with the third act the stage becomes the habitation of forces controlling human destiny. This act opens with a chorus of woodcutters who, against the background of a violin note "representing the forest" speak of the pursuit of the two lovers by the Bridegroom and his followers. Later, the Moon, also as a woodcutter, comes like "The false dawn through the shivering bough" and with his cold light empties the forest of any shadow that might conceal the fugitives. In this scene there also enters an old beggar woman covered in a green cloak who, with the Moon, conspires the death of both the lover and the Bridegroom. She is Death, who weaves in and out of the final act and indeed has never been far away from the play's opening. Opposed to the life-giving figure of the Mother, Death the beggarwoman is the force by which the tragedy is realized. The Beggarwoman closes the scene of death. "The Beggarwoman appears and stands with her back to the audience. She opens her cape and stands in the centre of the stage like a great bird with immense wings." So runs the stage direction. The producer is not left in doubt about her importance.

These figures so dominate the atmosphere that the flesh-and-blood characters themselves emerge as types battling against natural forces. The

conversation of the earlier scenes gives place to the lengthened utterance of poetry, while imagery becomes less localized and of wider significance.

The final scene attains a formal beauty of grouping and lyricism unequalled in modern drama. Allowing for the difficulty of capturing the spontaneity of the original Spanish, parts of this scene beg quotation. Two girls are discovered " in dark blue winding a red skein ".

First Girl: Wool, red wool[1]
What would you make?

Second Girl: Oh jasmine for dresses
fine wool like glass
At four o'clock born
at ten o'clock dead.
A thread from this wool yarn,
a chain round your feet
a knot that will tighten
the bitter white wreath.

Then comes the Beggarwoman Death casting a deeper shadow over the scene:

" Crushed flowers for eyes, and their teeth
two fistfuls of hard frozen snow.
And they come with two sheets
carried on the shoulders of two tall boys.
That's how it was; nothing more. What was fitting
Over the golden flower, dirty sand.

First Girl: Dirty sand

Second Girl: Over the golden flower

Third Girl: Over the golden flower
They're bringing the dead from the arroyo
Dark the one,
dark the other.
What shadowy nightingale flies and weeps
over the golden flower!

With these words the old woman goes out, leading the girls in a pavane-like figure.

Soon the mother enters, followed shortly afterwards by the bride " with blood-stains on her skirt and hair ". To the mother's charge of wanton dishonour to her son, she can only speak of her helplessness before the erotic attraction of the other. " Your son was my destiny and I have not betrayed him, but the other one's arm dragged me along like the pull of the sea, like the head toss of a mule and he would have dragged me always, always, always—even if I were an old woman and all your son's sons held me by the hair! "

[1] These and subsequent lines are quoted from the translation by Graham-Lujan and O'Connor (Penguin Books).

Whatever shape fate takes, through whatever forces it works, the suffering is the same.

" It's the same thing.
Always the cross, the cross." says the mother, to which the women answer:

" Sweet nails, cross adored
Sweet name of Christ Our Lord."

Finally, the mother with the women gathered round her closes the play with:

" Neighbours: with a knife,
with a little knife,
on their appointed day, between two and three,
these two men killed each other for love.
With a knife,
with a tiny knife
that barely fits the hand,
but that slides in clean
through the astonished flesh
and stops at the place
where troubles, enmeshed,
the dark root of a scream."

The tragic presentiment of the mother in the opening when her son asked for a knife to cut grapes from the vine, has come to full realization. The fruit has been cut indeed, and she can look to nothing but the withering of the vine in herself. With her son's death has died at last her dread of the knife, and in her final words she speaks of it for the last time. Its tragic symbolism has been fully realized.

Lorca's tragic protagonist is always a woman. Sharing much of Unamuno's pessimism, the final tragedy for Lorca is the end of mortal life. Man's mortality can only be challenged by human love and the procreation of life. In Woman, human love finds its fullest expression; in her, mortal life is propagated and kindled.

That Mariana Pineda, Dona Rosita Soltera, Yerma and Bernarda Alba's daughters are tragic, is so, not because of their own frustration, betrayal and death, but because in them dies the very promise of life.

GRACE BENTON

Grace Benton, whose solo performance of her monoplay *No Right to Roses* has been very well reviewed, is now under contract to the British and Foreign Bible Society, we understand, to write a second play for them.

The play, which has no title as yet, will be in the nature of a sequel to *No Right to Roses*, and is expected to be in production by March 1962. We shall look forward with some interest to seeing this new play.

A direct friendly warm-hearted person, with no mannerisms, Mrs. Benton first communicates with her audience through the charm of her personality, and then is able to convey the Christian faith which is an instinctive part of her. The result is that what she says in her solo performances carries conviction without falling into the sentimental or the pious. She has Ruth

Draper's ability to conjure up the other, unseen, characters, so that you can see them before you clearly as she talks to them, and enjoy their company.

Though the plays we have mentioned are commissioned for the B.F.B.S., they are of general interest, and she is available and can be engaged for any kind of function in any part of the country. Application for a performance of either play should be made to the Home Secretary, The British and Foreign Bible Society, 146 Queen Victoria Street, London, E.C. 4 (City 4751), or to Grace Benton, 30 High Street, Warwick, for other plays in her repertory.

THE HALF-YEARLY MEETING

May 27th, 1961

A varied programme attracted a record number of members to the Y.M.C.A., Great Russell Street, London, on May 27th, despite the fact that a lunch of sandwiches and cakes only could be supplied, instead of the usual three-course " sit-down ". It was good to have so many out-of-London members with us, and a great pleasure to welcome Mr. and Mrs. Martin Browne back into our midst.

The meeting opened at 11 a.m. when Mrs. Baxter introduced Mr. Michael Croft, Director of the Youth Theatre, who gave us a most enjoyably informal and informative discourse on his work, followed by questions from the audience. Mr. Croft stayed with us for lunch, and members were able to have further discussions with him.

Unfortunately Mrs. Baxter had to leave us for another meeting, but we had the good fortune to have Miss Stella Mary Pearce with us to introduce the afternoon's speakers, who tried to give us some help in choosing plays.

Mrs. Nora Ratcliff, herself a playwright, and tutor to the British Drama League's courses on playwriting, gave us some ideas on plays not to choose, and remarked that this was rather like being asked to open your neighbour's medicine cupboard and label the bottles. Some needed to be marked " Poisonous, do not touch ", but others were not quite so easy to classify.

Martyn Colborn, who will shortly be taking up his appointment as Director of Drama at Coventry Cathedral, gave us some suggestions for plays we might do in churches and clubs. He mentioned as especially effective in production, *The Story of Jeremiah*, *Birth by Drowning*, and the works of Kaj Munk.

James Roose-Evans talked, both as actor and producer, of the need to bring freshness and imagination to our approach to the great " evergreen " religious plays, and gave us some examples of how we might begin to look afresh at the well known script.

All three talks were crammed with stimulating ideas, and a most lively general discussion followed, which was only curtailed when we set out for St. Giles' Church.

In this lovely eighteenth-century church we saw the first performance in this country of Henzie Raeburn's new liturgical play, *The Green Wood*, produced by E. Martin Browne. This was most movingly acted by a cast which included the author and the producer, and called for the participation of the congregation, who were most appreciative of this appropriate ending to a very stimulating and happy day.

OBITUARY

ANNETTE MILLER

Annette was always one step ahead of herself. Her ringing laugh and quick speech were with one almost before she appeared: when she did, one realized one had forgotten how very blue her eyes were: and even before greetings were exchanged one was sharing her sheer delight in living. This infectious gaiety was the most signal of her many talents and gifts. It lit up her work and her play, and she spread courage and confidence as she moved along the days of her life. Her sudden departure has shocked all who knew her: but Annette always moved swiftly, and the life of the party has gone elsewhere.

Her coming to the Society in 1938 was one its many pieces of good fortune in respect of the people who serve it. The Founder, Mrs. Olive Stevenson, having battled through the troubles of its early years, had had to resign, and for the first time a Secretary had to be found. Annette Wellby came from being Organizer of the Sussex G.F.S. to be part-time Secretary, and immediately established warm relationships with members all over the country, for she was active not only in the office but in the conduct of meetings and training courses, having already a considerable practical knowledge and skill in theatre. She was a gay, efficient and imaginative worker, as was notably clear when in 1939 she designed and supervised the making of several hundred costumes for Christopher Fry's first work to be seen in London: the G.F.S. Pageant *Thursday's Child* at the Albert Hall.

When the war came, the Society found that it had to carry on not only its own job but also the management of the Pilgrim Players, which throughout the war years travelled a repertory of religious plays under the auspices of the Society and the Arts Council (then C.E.M.A.). Annette was the company's booking agent, as well as Secretary of the R.D.S., whose library she removed after 1940 to her own home at Lymington. This pair of labours, herculean when added together, she continued until towards the end of the war she married Dusty Miller.

When she was in the first flush of her happiness, she said, " We do everything together: we paint together, and we can say our prayers together. It's lovely! "

In 1946 the Millers became the resident staff of Britain's first Arts Centre, at Bridgewater, Somerset. This was another piece of pioneer work, in which Annette succeeded in carrying out a seemingly impossible assignment. When the Arts Council pulled out of it in 1951, the Millers continued to live in the Somerset countryside, where they seemed to find innumerable outlets for their creative abilities and their largeness of heart. Annette's taste was good, simple and robust. She understood artists, and helped many of them to find themselves and discover how to use their gifts.

She had not only a basic respect for the talents, and the oddities, of her fellows, but considered herself privileged to receive in turn the friendship and affection which she so generously poured out. She was quite unaware of her own humility, being completely free from that tiresome self-consciousness which ties so many of us in knots.

Our deepest sympathy goes to her husband and her two children; and the desire of our hearts is that the radiance and sparkle of their home may be sustained, because of the firm foundation on which its life has been built.

HENZIE AND MARTIN BROWNE.

Annette Miller will be sadly missed in Somerset, where her strong personality and direct, forthright approach to all she undertook made a very vital contribution to drama in the County. She was taken to hospital on the eve of her production of *Cry Dawn in Dark Babylon*, by Philip Turner, entered by the Kingston Players in this year's County Drama Festival. No one present could fail to be moved by the loyal way in which this group of village players worked together to put the play on, with great integrity, as she had planned it. Whatever one felt about the message of the play, the sincerity of its presentation was outstanding. It proved to be prophetic. Annette had left us before the County Finals took place, but we were all very conscious of her presence amongst us, on the Town Hall stage at Bridgwater, where only last year her players had performed so well under her direction.

Annette Miller was concerned with many aspects of the Drama; but, above all she enjoyed experimenting with new and provocative plays. For this, for her timeless energy and enthusiasm and for her search for Truth she will be remembered by all of us concerned with Drama in Somerset, with gratitude and affection.

ROSA D. EWING,
Somerset Drama Adviser.

The Religious Drama Society of Great Britain

will hold its

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

on

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 28th, 1961

at 11 a.m.

in the Central Y.M.C.A.

Tottenham Court Road, London, W. 1

MAKE A NOTE IN YOUR DIARY NOW

CORRESPONDENCE

THE EDITOR,
Christian Drama.

SIR,

The publication in your Winter, 1960, issue of Tom Driver's lecture at Royaumont entitled " The Church, the Theatre, and the World ", I found very thought-provoking and it brought to the surface many niggling doubts about just what we were doing in the field of Christian drama.

He states that the " function of Christian drama is the stimulation of the imagination " and not to deliver a message so clear that no further processes of the mind are necessary except to say " yes " or " no " to it. I am sure this is true, and probably most of us within the R.D.S. field would subscribe to this with our lips—but how far has this really penetrated into the whole of ourselves? There are still far too many religious plays being written which " point the moral " and deliver the Christian goods all nicely parcelled up in such a way that the wonder and mystery of our faith is reduced to the level of pious platitudes.

Real drama is concerned with life, with human beings, with their struggles and conflicts, joys and griefs. True religion is also concerned with life and, again, with human beings who are not plaster saints but warm-blooded men and women struggling to find themselves, and so perhaps to find God. Where are the plays written by Christian dramatists who portray this kind of contemporary conflict? And not with the answers all neatly written out to save us from thinking and agonizing, but stimulating us deep within ourselves so that to see the play is an experience which we enter into and take away with us and that long after has its impact on that which is developing within us.

Too often we make it sound as if we are saying—here is " the faith once delivered to the saints ", all you have to do is to accept it—full stop. Yet we know, if we dare to think about it, that life isn't like that. We see something, we come to a point of faith that is woven into our life, we know conflict and struggle with both the external and internal world, and we come to a fresh point in our developing lives where perhaps doubt enters in. Is this something to welcome or to eschew? I shall never forget a radio programme I heard some time ago in which was told dramatically the story of a Danish pastor and dramatist who was killed by the Nazis during the war. He talked of doubt as a stepping-stone to greater faith, and this is what it can be if we are willing to live with it until we come through it, until it can lead us to new knowledge of ourselves, of life, and of God. How much more would plays portraying real living in this way communicate themselves to men and women who know these things deep down, even if on the surface they are often lost in the superficialities of life.

People outside the Church frequently say they find the Church and its faith irrelevant to their lives. If this is so, part of the blame at least lies at our own door for so often we are too taken up with the humdrum in church life—the sales of work, the endless committees, etc.—to let the tremendous mysteries of the Christian faith blaze forth and be seen to be related to the human problems that beset us all. And I venture to say that partly it is because we are afraid of facing doubts within ourselves, so that—as some of our plays show –we must have the faith neatly packaged and ticketed and all the questions answered in advance and the characters carefully labelled as Christians and non-Christians, and so on. But—all the questions are *not* answered, and people do *not* fall into categories so easily, and the character who most compels our interest so that we identify ourselves with him is the one who portrays within himself conflicting ideas and qualities and is in the process of working these out. I can think of many plays by non-Christian writers who have a greater impact on me than most Christian ones. This is not to say that there are no Christian dramatists who have eschewed the pious phrases. Thank God there are some.

I have " stuck my neck out ", particularly since I am no dramatist so cannot do what I am pleading for others to do. But if I have exaggerated I have done so deliberately in the hope that this may stimulate others to join the fray. For heaven's sake, let's be done with the milk-and-water of pious platitudes and strait-jacket

theology and get some good, red meat into our Christian drama. Do you remember the words of Dorothy Sayers in her introduction to *The Man Born To Be King*?— "Not Herod, not Caiaphas, not Pilate, not Judas, ever contrived to fasten upon Jesus Christ the reproach of insipidity; that final indignity was left for pious hands to inflict. . . . Let me tell you, good Christian people, an honest writer would be ashamed to treat a nursery tale as you have treated the greatest drama in history."

Now I know that remedying this is one of the objects of the Religious Drama Society and that real strides have been made in the last twenty years or so. But we are still too tied to the conventional, too afraid of reaching out into the depths, too afraid of adventuring where orthodoxy may lay an accusing finger upon us. I must confess that what I would like to see are plays in which we can enter into human conflict, wherein we see the processes within a man or a woman that go to make up and cause to grow that mysterious thing called individuality, and the working of the Spirit within him in such a way that it is *real* and not just a pious overlay. If this could be presented within contemporary situations I believe it would have an impact on those outside the church who are thinking seriously and groping their way, as we are, towards wholeness. It would be a good thing also to experiment with the combination of music and dance with our drama—not for the sake of experiment but because all these things are a part of life and are a means of communication, for their colour and vitality are vivid and compelling to the imagination. I confess I have a dream of a *West Side Story* kind of play devised by dramatists and choreographers within the Religious Drama Society. Is this too ambitious a dream?

Yours sincerely,

PEGGY THORNBOROUGH.

BRANCH NEWS

Bristol, Gloucestershire and Somerset Branch

Annette Miller. The sudden death of Mrs. Miller, one of the most active of our Vice-Presidents, is a sad blow to the Branch and a personal loss to all of us who knew her. For many of us she was a long-established friend, to the Branch as a whole she was an ever-ready source of help and advice. Perhaps her main contribution was the encouragement given to all teams at our Festival of Religious Drama in 1958, when her tactful, but straightforward and constructive criticism helped to establish a standard. From this, and from another occasion, when she led a discussion on the production of new plays, members will remember her for the very qualities which most contributed to Annette's personality: her sincere belief in drama as an expression of Christian faith, her amazing appetite for hard work and refusal of the specious or shoddy, and her understanding and patience with those who were less gifted than herself in the art she practised.

Branch activities. There is little spectacular to report of Branch activities as such but the affiliated groups have been active in their own areas. Good use has been made of our local advice service, and some of our advisers have undertaken productions with new groups. Committee members have done their best to visit productions of member Groups, and a *Newsletter* has been put in circulation, to supplement, by local announcements and reports, the circulation of *Flash*. There has also been a serious drive to increase membership and to "round-up" temporarily lapsed members. Paid-up membership to date: fifty-nine.

The Branch is fortunate in having the whole-hearted support of Somerset County Drama Committee, and we have established a close—and very helpful—relationship with the Somerset Guild of Playwrights.

The Branch started with something of a "sprint" in 1957. We are now settling down to a steady, dogged "run" on our fourth lap.

N. RATCLIFF.

ADDITIONS TO THE LIBRARY

PLAYS

Christus Rex. Ed. H. M. Lloyd. (S.P.C.K., 3/6.) X.

This is not a play, but a series of one-hour programmes of dramatic readings from the Bible and Book of Common Prayer designed to be used in conjunction with Holy Week services.

Originally done in Gibraltar Cathedral, the useful notes to the scheme indicate the necessary preparations, and make it clear that it could be used in any church, large or small, provided there is a nucleus of good readers ready to give time and enter into the spirit of the pilgrimage. (No fees.) *E. Peake.*

Everyman; a new version. James Forsyth. (Typescript.) H. Continuous action. 16 characters.

A new version of *Everyman* reminds us of the constant need to refresh the language; it is most welcome that this work of artistry, dignity and sound theology be represented.

In the fifteenth century *Everyman* there is much opaque indeed obscure to the twentieth-century everyman, who would at least require to be familiar with the idiom of five hundred years earlier, if not with the doctrinal teaching of medieval Catholic Europe.

Mr. Forsyth has given us a version which fulfils the demands of the original and which remains very much a "players' play". The almost bewildering variety of line has been resolved, and a flowing quality achieved. There is a very judicious use of the short line most effective in the scourging scene. The play reads very well.

There is no loss of characterization, rather additional scope, and Everyman develops in dignity—human dignity with which this twentieth century has had to be so much concerned.

We are asked to look upon the great Christian Mysterion—the grave, the cave, the womb, except a man be born again—then the great silence which is the progress of the soul, the moment of truth.

Here is intensity, a vivid rendering which it is hoped will meet with the intelligence and sensitivity in production which it well deserves. (Fee: apply author, c/o R.D.S.) *M. Watts.*

Faith of Our Fathers. D. S. Daniell *and* G. W. H. Lampe. (University of London Press, 1/9 per vol.) 4 vols.

These four little books, a complete series, present an overall picture of the growth of the church from A.D. 150 to the present day. The information contained in them is accurate, clear and well presented.

Each book contains four short playlets. There is a framework of factual historical information, inside which the play is skilfully fitted.

This is an excellent way of teaching. Children will enjoy the stories and the speech is always simple and clear. The characters are well-drawn and authentic and the material used sufficiently concise to be effective, with one exception, that of the Lollards in Book II where the material is used in such a way that the whole truth is not revealed. I should like this play more fully developed. A good deal of additional teaching needs to be used to supplement this particular play. All the others are explicit.

One of the great virtues of these books is the way in which the plays are grouped. One play presents fairly one facet of a situation, and the following play completes the picture showing the long-term development in history. They are very useful little books to have in any kind of school—day or Sunday School. (Fees for public showing: apply publishers.) *K. Hudson.*

The Gardens of Adonis. Peter Watling. (Evans Bros., 6/–.) H. 3 acts (2 hrs.) 2m., 6w.

This play is not specifically religious. The theme is forgiveness, played against the background of the Easter celebrations in the Greek Church on a Mediterranean island. A major's wife comes back after a period in a clinic to combat drunkenness;

the reaction of her teenage daughter, of the efficient woman who has run the house in the wife's absence, and the whole question of rehabilitation, make for what we used to call a "strong play"; an opportunity here for first-rate acting and production. The play has had a repertory production at the Theatre Royal, Windsor. (Fee: £5. 5s., £4. 4s.) *The Rev. J. B. Knight.*

Mine Enemy, My Friend. T. B. MORRIS. (Garnet Miller, 2/6.) H. 1 act. 7w.

This could well be used for a women's group, and set and costumes could easily be made effective. However there is little plot or any great message in it, although what there is does follow quite closely its source, the book of Esther, dealing as it does with the characters of Esther and Vashti, the deposed Queen. It is not outstanding, though useful for a small play for women. (Fee: apply publishers.) *E. Palmer.*

Never Miss Out. WENDY DE LA BERE. (Typescript.) 1 act. 4w.

The author has taken the theme of "Love thy neighbour as thyself" and shown the failure of the characters to do this. The play is extremely short; it would possibly play for twenty minutes or under, but it needs practically no setting except a telephone. The four ladies in the cast take it in turns to hold a long conversation over the telephone, and these monologues are linked together by a satirical chorus of cliches (in blank verse) from the listeners. It is rather inconclusive, but might well fill a want for a cast who are looking for a short item of a serious nature which would not need much rehearsing as the play is very static. (Fee: apply author, c/o R.D.S.) *Lyn Oxenford.*

The Rough and Ready Lot. ALUN OWEN. (Encore, 6/–.) H. 3 acts (125 mins.). 5m., 1w.

This is a real play about real soldiers in a real dilemma. The action takes place in South America, a few years after the American Civil War. The question of whether or not to blow up a monastery results in a real development of character with no hint of stock arguments. Two of the soldiers are Irish R.C.s but Mr. Owen writes as if he had never met a stock character. The fact that the play has no "message" means that it says a great deal. Experienced cast and producer required. (Fee: apply publishers.) *F. Glendenning.*

The Sacrifice of Isaac. GORDON SPENCE. (Typescript.) H. 1 act. 4m.

An unusual interpretation of the Genesis story of Abraham; what really happened on that hill-top? Not everyone will agree with the answer Mr. Spence suggests, but it is consistent with primitive practice and worthy of serious consideration. (Fee: apply author, c/o R.D.S.)

The Three-Sighted. H. M. WILSON. (Linden Press, 6/–.)

This dramatic poem for nine Voices, previously reviewed as a typescript, is now available in print.

Thy Cloak Also. MARY NEILD. (Typescript.) H. 1 act. 4w.

An embittered middle-aged widow fought a losing battle for her husband with her poisonously sweet mother-in-law, and now faces losing the allegiance of her twelve-year-old daughter in the same way. A kindly Health Visitor with a strong practical Christian faith calls by chance, and with her help the situation is transformed—but not easily. (Fee: apply International Copyright Bureau.)

A Subject of Scandal and Concern. JOHN OSBORN. (Faber, 5/–.) 3 acts. 18m., 2f.

Written for television, this would be difficult to adapt to the stage, unless after the fashion of *Under Milk Wood*. The central character is George Holyoake, the last person to be imprisoned in this country for the crime of blasphemy. In fact it is another variation by Osborne on the theme of the Establishment and its evils, and is a little embarrassing to a contemporary Christian; but it is significant that he should think blasphemy is worth discussing. The dialogue is as well written as we should expect from such a playwright. (Fee: apply publishers.) *R. Sansom.*

A Time to be Born. WARREN TUTE. (Evans Bros., 6/–.) H. 3 acts. 4m., 4f.

Here is a contemporary play which upholds the Christian standard of marriage, and contrives to be dramatically interesting too. It smacks a little of drawing-room comedy, and the dialogue doesn't always ring true, but the over-riding theme is magnificently developed, affecting practically every character in the play. Superficiality and selfishness come up against true values; the characters who were running away from reality are made to accept life as it is. The play has been produced on television and by the Guildford Theatre Company. (Fee: £5. 5., £4. 4.)

R. Sansom.

A Very Cold Night. DENNIS J. WINNIE. (Bakers Plays, Boston, 60c.) H. 1 act. 3m.

A ten-minute conversation in a modern setting and language between the two men crucified with Christ: who will give up the place by the stove on this cold night.

The dialogue is in the style of Beckett and Pinter. It was presented at the International Conference at Royaumont in 1960 by players from Union Theological Seminary, New York.

An interesting idea, though hardly long enough to stand by itself it might be useful as an *entr'acte* or an exercise. (Fee: $5.) *E. Peake.*

The Woodcarver. MORRIS BROWN. (Evans Bros., 6/–.) H. 3 acts. (1 hr. 45 mins.) 4m., 4w.

This play offers strong acting parts in characterizations that are worth making the effort to portray. The main theme concerns a carver of traditional statues of crucifixes, madonnas and the like; his work is good in an imitative style. The opportunity to create a crucified Christ in his own style produces a carving which horrifies the viewers. It is too horrible, it must be destroyed. Subsequent events however serve to change the opinions of those who demand its destruction, and their own suffering brings them to a deeper reality of the crucified Christ.

The play was first produced on television, and subsequently adapted for the stage and performed at the Bristol Old Vic. (Fee: £5. 5s., £4. 4s.) *The Rev. J. B. Knight.*

REFERENCE BOOKS

The Actor in Training. MORRIS FISHMAN. (Herbert Jenkins, 16/–.)

Mr. Fishman's book seems to me an excellent handbook for aspiring teachers of acting. In it he first sets out the various Schools of Acting as he sees them, although to me he exaggerates the number and makes " Schools of Acting " where none exists. There is surely no definite " Rubber Stamp " School? What he calls the " rubber stamp " system is merely a quick, facile and utterly superficial method which has evolved among actors in weekly repertory where there is just no time for adequate analysis or preparation for any part. Hence the series of effective " tricks " which enable the actor to delude the audience into thinking it has seen a good performance. I decline to believe that a " rubber stamp " system, as such, is ever actually *taught* anywhere—at least I sincerely hope not!

When talking of Stanislavsky and the " Method " Mr. Fishman seems to me both intelligent and thoughtful. It is true, as he says, that most of the so-called " Method " actors base their philosophy entirely upon *An Actor Prepares*, to the complete exclusion of *Building a Character*, the book which, as Mr. Fishman says, provides the corrective to the earlier book. The result is that the " Method " actor, as such, when faced with a piece of High Comedy or indeed almost any classical role is utterly unable to project it in the theatre, as he lacks the necessary external preparation that would balance the excellent " inside " work he has done and enable him to " put it over ". Mr. Fishman's approach to this is very sensible. He presents us with many very useful exercises for developing inner sensitivity and emotion, but side by side with this we are advised on Movement, Speech, etc., which will help us to present the part to the wide audience of today.

I sometimes think he strives a little too much to be non-partisan in his methods, and I personally take strong issue with him when he gives us exercises for developing Timing. I am convinced that Timing cannot be taught. It is an instinctive thing and depends largely upon the reactions of the audience which, as we all know, varies

at each performance. I'm certain that formal exercise of the kind that Mr. Fishman advises (" take three steps to the right, then turn ") would result in mechanical acting almost on the " rubber stamp " style he so rightly rejects. All acting, both dramatic and comedic, must arise out of the thought of the character, and any too conscious " counting of beats " etc., would destroy all sincerity.

Nevertheless this is a well presented, clearly written book which will be of great use to teachers of Drama. I am not so sure that it is a book which comes into the province of the R.D.S., except as a reference book for instructors looking for useful exercises. *Alan Wilson.*

Bibel-Pantomimer. B. HELLERSTEDT THORIN.

This handbook of Liturgical Drama emanates from Lund, Sweden (written in Swedish). It is designed for a small group of men and women, acting in church with a narrator reading from the New Testament, and the rest of the group making stylized moves and gestures. One or two of the mimes would be very effective. The rest are perhaps a little too simple. *R. Sansom.*

Choosing a Play. ROY STACEY. (Herbert Jenkins, 6/–.) *Practical Stage Handbook Series.*

A handbook packed with six-shillingsworth of sound common sense. It is of value not only to amateur acting groups, but also to would-be playwrights, who could learn a lot from the Chapter: " What is a Good Play? " The section on religious plays will help inexperienced groups, and will remind others of a few essential points, e.g., " When assessing religious plays it is important to watch carefully for any distortion or part presentation of the truth, to suit a particular point of view, or baulking at harsh facts because they do not happen to suit his purpose ". Here is a sound piece of advice which many Christian propagandists-through-drama could well take to heart. Mr. Stacey sums up his book in a useful list of questions by which to assess any play, religious or otherwise, and a list of Sources of Supply is also of practical help. A useful addition to any Drama Shelf. *Nora Ratcliff.*

Why Not Write a Documentary Play? LUCILE SPALDING, ALISON GRAHAM-CAMPBELL, HELEN ANDERSON, *and* MARION JAY. (University of London Press, 8/6.)

This book is written by four women. For years, men have theorized about documentaries, about the need for them, have even produced documentaries and semi-documentaries, and semi-semi-documentaries . . . and some extraordinarily fine ones, too, like Unity Theatre's *Bus Strike* one, way back in the thirties. These four women have now writeen a book as a guide to those in the amateur theatre who might be expected to write documentaries yet rarely do. Many equate the word " documentary " with some effort artistically or politically above their brows. These four took up all the ideas and theories, and they applied the techniques to the kind of dramatic work in which they were already involved. They have now noted down, for others, what works and what does not, what is practical and what is not. Anybody reading this book could make a very fair effort at putting on a documentary. The book cannot supply imagination but it can stimulate it. They have used an excellent blend of imagination and practicality in the documentaries that they themselves created (for women's organizations and elsewhere). *Olive Wilkinson.*

MUSIC

Herod; a medieval Nativity play, tr. and ed. W. L. SMOLDON. (Stainer and Bell, 5/6.) Music drama. Unison soprano voices, soloists (various), optional instruments (organ, recorders, strings, trumpet).

This is really a nativity opera rather than a play, since it is sung throughout. It is a very scholarly edition of two of the wonderful thirteenth-century music dramas contained in the " Fleury Play-book " from an Orleans MS. Dr. Smoldon, who is the leading authority on these " liturgical dramas (see his article in the *New Oxford History of Music*, Vol. II), has given us here an acting version in English of the two plays dealing with the Shepherds and the Wise Men, with excellent notes on pro-

duction, costume, etc. Whether he has always given prospective performers sufficient help in the way of accompaniment is a matter open to question. In countries where monody is still practised extensive drones or " pedal points " are habitually employed, and there is no proof that such was not the case when these plays were performed in medieval churches. The few rhythmical pieces in *Herod* are provided with such accompaniments, but there are whole pages for the singers with nothing but an occasional trumpet-call (and not a very inspiring one) to keep them in tune. Especially in the final Te Deum, which should form a moving climax to the drama, does some indication of accompaniment seem necessary.

This publication may therefore be described as a first-class " scholar's edition ", a good " acting edition ", but as a " performing edition " leaving something to be desired. The musical director who undertakes it will need to put his thinking cap on before it can be translated into a wholly satisfying work of art in performance. Still, this is a challenge! (Reprinted by kind permission from *Making Music*.)

FAR AND WIDE

Brent Knoll, Somerset

John Arden's Nativity Play.

The County Drama Adviser for Somerset writes in her report:

A floodlit church, like a beacon, beckoned across the marshes, to the long ribbon of cars making its way to the little church on the hill at Brent Knoll. People from neighbouring hamlets and towns jostled with newspaper men and students to see John Arden's version of the Christmas story. The large congregation waited reverently and in silence for the timeless message of Christmas to begin. There was to be no comfortable sagging in the pews that night, however, no friendly bells or tuneful carols. For this play from its first challenging narration, cast sentiment aside, and in a direct and forthright manner set out to underline the true meaning of Christmas and its relation to the world situation today.

If it was stark to austerity, it made an even greater impact through its utter simplicity. The players, a cross section of men and women as one would expect to find in any village community, were fully aware of the implications of the play. They had been well directed and they performed with authority and truth.

This play deserved to hit the headlines as it did. Even the " Lotus Eaters " watching their television sets were stirred. For here, was a vigorous underlining of God's Word which could be taken both as a prophecy and a warning. It took the comfort out of sitting.

ROSA EWING.

A member of the Library Committee comments on the script:

For a Royal Court playwright this is a disappointingly conventional treatment of the " Christmas story ". Herod, the shepherds, the angel, the Wise Men, Joseph and Mary all appear with the addition of a secretary for Herod, a hostess for the inn, and a midwife for Mary.

Arden must be indebted to Ghéon's *Journey of the Three Kings* for his presentation of Herod, the secretary and the Wise Men. The shepherds are earthy but less robust than their confrères in the Wakefield Cycle. Of Mary it can only be said that the author seems to be afraid of her.

She is overprotected by Joseph, the hostess and the midwife, who bury her under their trivialities of conversation. She is allowed to say little but " Thank you ", except for this haunting quatrain which suggests a quality that might well have been developed.

> " Nine months ago I dreamt a dream:
> A white fish swam into my heart.
> I took my hand and pulled it out:
> And the hands of the strong men
> tore the little fish apart."

An essential feature of any Christmas play must be the feeling of the contemporaneity of the Incarnation. This play is not particularly successful here, as modern parallels with refugees and occupied countries only serve to label the Incarnation more firmly as past history.

It was written for a particular church and therefore subject to limitations these

criticisms do not allow for. It makes good use of the church building, and allows scope for the imaginative producer while at the same time providing a helpful framework for production.

F. GLENDENNING.

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Calne, Wilts.

The theme of *Christ Crucified*, by Margaret Cropper, is the betrayal, trial and crucifixion of Our Lord, but it is more than a "remembrancer" of the Passion. The events are interspersed by meditations on the love and redeeming purpose of God. It is not a great play, but its author's sincerity and gift of phrasing make it a not unworthy vehicle for what Dorothy Sayers called "the greatest drama in the world".

I saw the Calne Church Players present this play in St Mark's Church, Salisbury. It was their sixth performance, for they had already given it in six different churches in Wiltshire, and had another five performances in other churches yet to come. Only a devoted Players' group under inspired leadership could have undertaken such a pilgrimage. Their organization is a triumph. They travel with their own lighting equipment and staging—the latter so designed that it can fit into any Church, small or large. To ensure that everyone in the congregation shall be able to see, the rostra are high, and the steps to them, of necessity, steep. At times I feared that with so large a cast one of the players might slip, but they all moved with assurance. Restricted space made the grouping too crowded at times, but it was always effective. Costume colour was superb. The simple, well-chosen music—the Players bring their own organist—helped to build-up the devotional atmosphere.

What a joy it is to hear beautiful solo and choric speech. Every word was clear and compelled our attention from first to last. The Players were a team, playing as a unity, each one giving his or her best for the perfection of the whole. For this reason it seems wrong to mention individual characters, but never before have I seen a Mary so stricken to the heart, yet still retaining the quiet dignity and acceptance of "the handmaid of the Lord". We were told that the man who played Judas had failed to arrive. I doubt if anyone in the congregation would have known, so excellently did his understudy step into the part, and so strongly did the rest of the cast support him.

The Bishop gave his blessing. We are blessed indeed in this diocese of Salisbury, for over the years the Calne Church Players and their director Katherine O'Hanlon, have given us Religious Drama at its best. What it has cost them in time, effort, and personal sacrifice we shall never know, but we do know that they have abundantly enriched our church life, and provided us with an unfailing source of inspiration.

EVELYN HART.
(*Diocesan Drama Adviser for Salisbury Diocese*)

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Durham

The enterprise and courage of The King's Men in choosing an unknown Danish author for this term's play was well rewarded by the success of *The Word* in Durham on March 8th and 9th. Often reminiscent of Ibsen and Strindberg, as is natural, Kaj Munk has the vigour, energy and confidence one might expect in a Christian martyr, for in playing that part he met his end during the Nazi occupation of his country. He is not concerned with politics, but with the forms into which human temperaments shape religion, with the nature of miracles, and with the accidents of birth and death. These large themes he has confined in a sinewy construction of four scenes and twelve speaking parts. He shows us two households, a successful farmer's and a poor tailor's. Both are religious, both have their troubles, the poverty of the one sweetened by the delights of prayer and testimony, the comfort of the other plagued by the strangeness of one son, the unrequited love of another, and the bad temper of their father. At the centre of this household stand the good and loving parents of two little girls, and the young mother is "taken away". It is the effect of this catastrophe on all the characters which provides the solution to their predicament; in the extreme case it looses the bonds of madness. The moment of the miracle, when the mystic and the child recall the dead woman in her coffin is the highest drama. Against this had been set the revivalist meeting which never descended to caricature, although

the tailor came direct from Cruickshank's Dickens. The three young men at the farm were all quite different, but all obviously brothers and each seemed to have a clear idea of the person he was portraying. It is hard for a young man to play an old one especially an irascible old man who is not made to be funny. One thought of Lear, but that did not help. This character is difficult to understand, and in this case the actor did not express it. The two professionals who enter the house in the way of business are harshly treated by the author, but here the actor, playing the Pastor, gained our sympathy for the character, and the doctor, well intentioned, rosy and bewildered, was successful too.

The dresses were not easy to make interesting, but where there was a chance to make a fine effect, as with Inger's red frock and stiff green smock, it was brilliantly seized. The other costumes were perfectly credible. The settings had to be drab and cold, but the difference between the farm and the shop was cleverly made. It was a pity that the electrician missed his big chance with the car lights.

Much praise is due to the producer, Martyn Colborn, who was made available by the Committee for Religious Drama in the Northern Province, and who goes in July as Director of Drama to Coventry Cathedral. It was his tact and authority which more than once saved us from deadly embarrassment, and which made the performance into a coherent whole. One felt that it was all contained and had taken place in his mind before he began to call out of his actors so much beauty and truth. We hope to see more of his work on the existing stage of the new Cathedral, and to delve deeper in the quarry of this new playwright.

HELEN LAYBOURNE.

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Hartley Victoria College, Manchester

"*Cry Dawn in Dark Babylon*".

We are, of course, a Methodist Theological College, but fortunate in that a number of our students are married with wives living nearby. So in our production we were fortunate to have the parts of Mrs. Jones and Woman 1 actually played by women. The parts of Woman 2 and Woman 3 were played by our own students. We felt that some of the lines written for them needed both male vigour and voice (e.g., "This is the day of the Common man. . . ." "Comrades, self-criticism. . . ." "This is an unofficial strike.") They won the affections of the audience immediately and impressed their final message upon the audience very deeply.

We found that the play was heavy going for the audience, but with so many Theologs around, laughing and groaning in the right places, they were carried through and eventually could not fail to see that it was their very selves whom we were "getting at". Judging by comments received after the performance, the first half of the play needs clearing up a bit, and making more obvious. They only got the meaning in retrospect. As far as I'm concerned, retrospect is a good and very necessary part of religious drama, but it seems a little hard on the audience to keep them pretty well completely baffled as to what is happening. Their ability to do mental gymnastics was tested to the full when Adam and Eve appeared in lounge suit and costume respectively, but certain of our brethren viewed with suspicion the departure from the fig-leaves tradition!!

The section about disposing of the body seems the most difficult part of the play, especially if one is not quite *au fait* with Evelyn Waugh's *The Loved One*. However, we concentrated upon it as a means of giving the audience a little light relief.

Chorus speaking was difficult; eventually we had to resort to the sharing of the speeches (with the exception of the liturgical "Holy, Holy, Holy. . . ." and the sentences "as it was in the beginning; is now shattered by man (spoken solo) to which the chorus replied "and ever shall be, etc."

Our thanks to the author P. W. Turner must be recorded; he gave us plenty to think about. We hope that our audience continue to think along the lines of the play, and try, with however much success, to put it into practice.

PETER JENNINGS.

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New York

The first conference sponsored by the Religious Drama Council of Manhattan, a body inaugurated in 1959 as a part of the Manhattan Division of

The Protestant Council, took place on April 14th and 15th this year. More than 135 people attended the proceedings, which included talks, discussions and play productions, as well as seminars on costume, lighting and organization, and a demonstration rehearsal, led by Norman Dietz, director of the Lutheran Foundation for Religious Drama.

Speakers included the Rev. Sidney Lanier, chairman of the Council, Mr. Robert Seaver, Director of Drama at Union Theological Seminary, who was a member of the Programme Committee, and Mr. Wyman Pendleton, a speech therapist from the Alfred Dixon Speech Centre, who discussed the problems of acoustics in church productions and how to be heard in spite of them.

The Council links various churches in Manhattan for the sharing of ideas, problems, resources and techniques related to religious drama on the parish level. It hopes to expand activities, and this conference marks an important stage in the development of its useful work.

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North Greenford, Middlesex

Gates of Hell, by Joyce Biddell, said some time ago what Fr. Martin Thornton has written more recently about the need for quality in the spiritual life of the Church before we begin in this generation on the task of converting the world. In All Hallows' Church Hall the summons to Holiness was made with some obvious effect on the audience, who came (I think) not quite sure what to expect from a " religious " play given outside church.

There is always a danger when the devil appears in the list of characters—men are more able to play it than the protagonist angels; and angels must bear with them on the stage, unhelped by the associations of a church building, some of the awe, glory, and power that is High Heaven's. The angels in this production did not always do so; the " Church's caretaker ", Satan, ran through the contrasting moods of rage, pride, self-excusing, and almost dominated the stage too much. The angels, and particularly the Pentecost Angel, have to create the sense of loving confidence in the power of the Spirit in the Church, and by their comments on the scenes the awareness that all history belongs to the plan of God. This con fidence and awareness has a mor limited, yet deeper, range of voice an movement to express itself than th devil's persuadings, and occasionall was disturbed by overemphasis or a awkward movement. The " human characters sustained their scenes well- fewer pitfalls here!

The audience may have come no quite knowing what to expect. The were obviously moved by the pro duction and the words of the play. Or party on the first night came quite long way. It was well worth it.

C. W. Danes.

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Radlett, Herts.

The performance of *Caesar's Frien* in Radlett in Holy Week achieved mo for the glory of God than its promoter ever envisaged. In the first place th cast, most of whom possessed mo courage and devotion than actin experience were strengthened by som gifted amateurs whose acting was support to the waverers and a challeng to each to give his best. The atmosphe of devotion in which rehearsals we undertaken enabled the Holy Spirit n only to inspire the performance but t influence the lives of many, probably all those concerned.

Then stage technicians from t Radlett Players and Churches of oth denominations in the town transform the tiny stage. An apron with ste from the hall on either side added s feet to the depth and a permanent set " stone " archway and walls—used wi grey traverse curtains, made four rap scene changes possible without a hitc Lighting and costumes were very goo and there were three crowded audienc

G. T.

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Risca, Mon.

On Palm Sunday I went to see a pr duction in Risca of my short Passio play *Is It Nothing to You*. It was t first time it had been performed outsi our own group in Malvern, and I w anxious to compare the productio The contrast could not have be greater. Our production had be designed for a large church, needi plenty of movement; St. Margare Players produced the play on a sm stage in a hall—something I would n have thought possible if I had not se

ıow very effective it was. Movement vas naturally constricted, but the arying of the groups to show the rogress on the road to Calvary was leverly arranged on a series of raised latforms, and the play never became tatic.

For our own production, the players vere dressed in an array of blending olours; St. Margaret's seven players—hree men and four women—were lressed in simple white costumes, which vere extremely effective against a plain lue back-cloth.

The more dramatic moments in the lay were subtly underlined by music, nd excerpts from Bartok's concerto and Brahms symphonies were used to great ffect for this, and for linking the pisodes of the play together.

I was most impressed by the sincerity f the players, and the deep absorption hey brought to the performance.

M. C. Dixey.

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Roehampton, Surrey

The first Passion Play, it appears, ver performed below the lofty Chancel rch in Holy Trinity Church, Roeampton, was presented to crowded nd intensely responsive congregations n Tuesday and Wednesday evenings n Holy Week. This Roehampton ompany of four unnamed men and hree women also presented this drama, *Christ in the Concrete City*, on Good Friday in the Community Centre of the Ashburton Estate. But the most powerul impression is of the natural mystery f a darkened church, enhanced by the esources of spot-lighting and imaginaive grouping to set off Philip Turner's nodern Passion Play which moved rresistibly to its climax when total larkness is dispelled by the light of the vorld suffusing the reredos.

It is never easy to convey the quality f a highly trained amateur performance. Local reviews are bedevilled by flabby praise bestowed on parochial theatricals which would never bear transference utside an indulgent circle. But Roeampton's anonymous company stands plendidly apart. By their natural novements and expressions and perectly timed antiphony of voices in a attern of cross-talk communicating the Passion in brisk, sometimes slangy peech contrasted with the most solemn noments, these players would have held a Christian audience anywhere. No doubt the certainty of their teamwork was due to the experienced direction of Miss Edith Palmer. But the conviction which shone through the performance must have found stimulus in Philip Turner's script which increasingly gathers momentum in a stylized convention which has precedents in religious drama of the high seriousness of Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*.

The Christ is invisible. His entry is first signalled during the trial before Caiaphas. The peremptory question, "Has the prisoner anything to say?" brings the eyes of the cloaked Chorus turning together on an imaginary figure in the darkened nave. This is the first crucial moment in a drama which, after a slowish start, has begun to fascinate the audience without closely involving it. But now every back straightens in its pew. Every spectator experiences an uncanny sensation of being identified with the unseen presence facing these accusers. Baffled by the silence, the accusing Chorus jeers, becomes inceasingly disquieted ("Leave us alone, can't you?"), and inevitably condemns the silent prisoner who plagues their conscience. From that moment the congregation feels personally involved in this Christian drama of life and death and resurrection, enacted on a bare stepped rostrum.

There are moments in *Christ in the Concrete City* which are as moving as any in the religious dramas which inspired it. The symbolic flogging of Christ is in every sense an ordeal to which the cast rose memorably. It could not quite persuade us in the Simon of Cyrene episode, because here for once the text does not seem to ring true. Most poignant was the hushed advance of the holy women up the aisle (their disappearance from the rostrum had been beautifully disguised), and the great wailing cry "My son is dying". The vocal interplay of the two young women with a maturer one was, indeed, as delicately contrived as their concerted playing.

The men were more contrasted. Pilate was the most resonant, with a decisive assurance one had not looked for in that troubled governor. To him the balding, silky-voiced Caiaphas was exactly the right foil. Their two younger associates, whether in action or narration, maintained the pace of a

production which never faltered in the course of an hour which seemed no longer than an inspired sermon of twenty minutes.

NEVILE WALLIS.

(*by kind permission of the "Wandsworth Borough News"*)

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Scarborough, Yorks.

Birth by Drowning was presented in St. Columba Church by permission of the York Diocesan Advisory Committee for Religious Drama. The play is based on the Old Testament stories about Elisha, and for all that he is seen as a country doctor practising in the northern dales, his duties are nearer those of a prophet, and his methods of dispensing cures with the assistance of mountains that not only speak, but dance and sing, are not only humorous, but would meet with disproval from the Medical Council. If not some puritans also. Nevertheless we are constantly reminded that for Elisha, at least, God is waiting in the wings; and amidst some turbulent neighbours (beautifully fleshed northern characters these), and warring enemies from over the border, he remains resolute to convince Naaman that the echoes of the mountains are more than many believe them to be.

The nave of this clean open-spaced church made an excellent substitute for the dales, and if the gyrations of the mountains played havoc with ones stage geography, the script is so wonderfully illuminating that the ear can lead the eye. Artificial lighting enhanced this play that proceeds through many stages of day and visibility, and in this production bird song was used to set the scenes and obtained continuity without the annoyance of intervals. This is a challenging play by Norman Nicholson, striking quite a original note, and being narrative rather than spiritual drama, demands much more than the sincerity one so often has to fall back on in performances of Christian Drama.

J. STARLING.

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Southgate, North London

On Sunday (the 12th May), as part of the evening service at The Bourne Methodist Church, there was a performance of a new version of the medieval play, *Everyman*.

The story is old, but the new text prepared by the producer, Mr. T. H Henderson, in modern English brough up-to-date some of the more difficul concepts of the original, and emphasized the relevance of the play to our present day life and times.

The cast was predominantly a youn one. The name part of Everyman wa played by a nineteen-year-old membe of the church in ordinary everyda clothes. His earthly goods were repre sented by someone from "the City" with briefcase and umbrella, and hi friends and his physical attributes such as Strength, Beauty and his Five Wit were all represented by the kind of youn people one would expect to meet at an time around Southgate.

The whole presentation was in fac designed to show how the plight o Everyman, as seen by the unknow author so long ago, could apply equall well to Mr. Everyman of Palmers Gree or Southgate today.

(*by kind permission of th "Palmers Green and Southgate Gazette"*

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Southampton

The last production in Stephe Joseph's 1961 Season at Southampton Ghéon's *The Way of the Cross* wa performed during Easter Week. It described in a programme note by M Joseph as "part of a Passion pla written in 1932 by the French playwrigh Henri Ghéon. It gives a series of wor pictures, corresponding to the fourtee Stations of the Cross".

The astonishing power of projectio displayed by the dedicated young acto of the Studio Theatre Company hel the attention of the audience from th moment they entered the arena. Th was indeed according to the principle "four boards and a passion"—th passion being a burning histrionic zea Two women and three men—the wome in black tights and vivid red cloaks, th men in period dress of mediev derivation—watched the sufferings Christ and made their commentary the events which led to Calvary. TH amount of dramatic tension achieve was very remarkable considering th the action took place off-stage and th emotion was supplied, as it were, secon hand. Nevertheless, it ran through th players like an electric current. Th pointed at the Man of Sorrows and yo eyes followed the pointing finger beyon

the arena; they joined with the mockers and your spirit winced; they deplored mankind's responsibility for the crucifixion of Christ—it was impossible not to feel ashamed.

Perhaps we have become over familiar with the traditional story of the Passion of Our Lord. Scene follows scene—the impact of the tragedy is blunted by anticipation. In *The Way of the Cross* the novel presentation helps to gain the interest of the audience, but without a high standard of acting, this interest would not be held, as there is not the pictorial appeal of an "orthodox" Passion Play. As it was, the episodes of the mocking, scourging and nailing to the cross were brought so powerfully before one's eyes by these five talented young people that at times one was almost tempted to cry out, "Don't look any more! Don't tell me any more!" And how skillfully these actors altered both voice and facial expression, as their lines demanded that they should be at one moment the embodiment of mocking cruelty and at another the perfect expression of grief and homage. A truly memorable performance for Easter Week.

NORAH K. SMITH.

(Editor of the Southampton Theatre Guild's magazine *Prompter*)

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Southwark

For their annual Easter production in the Chapter House of the Cathedral, the Southwark Religious Drama Group this year chose two plays by B. M. Clegg. The major one of the two, *The Apple Tree*, deals with the legend (handed down to us by Bede) of the first English poet, Caedmon. Employed as a cowherd at the Abbey of Whitby he dreamt one night that an angel appeared to him and commanded him to sing "of the beginning of created things". This he did and upon waking he remembered the words that had come to him so miraculously and repeated them to the Abbess. He then turned parts of the scriptures into verse for her and was received into the Abbey as a monk, where he remained for the rest of his life, writing songs and verse.

This is the simple story upon which Miss Clegg has based her delightful little play. It is interpreted very faithfully and straightforwardly at Southwark, with a few rostra draped in sacking to represent the cowshed in which the action takes place. The play depends, of course, upon the person playing Caedmon, and the group were most fortunate in having an actor who realized the character so completely. This was one of the best amateur performances I have seen in recent years. Caedmon was simple, uneducated, but honest and after the scene with the Angel, transformed. One really did believe in his having seen a vision, he became almost a Saint. A first-rate performance. He was very well supported by a hard-working cast. One small criticism—did the Devil have to wear long nails and be quite so much of a Demon King? The actor playing the part was very good, but I think a less theatrical Devil would have been more effective.

The other play, surprisingly by the same author, I'm afraid I think nothing of as either a play or as a religious work! Ursula Nicholl's production was excellent, and the actors tried very hard. It was no fault of theirs that the characters never really emerged as real people. The fault lies with the author who instead of creating believable human beings as she has done in *The Apple Tree*, here deals in cliches. The old gaffer with the "rheumatiz", the village idiot with toothache and the others are characters from English Farce, and not very good farce at that! In my view it was a great pity that this play had to be done in the same programme as *The Apple Tree*, which was so excellent. The group are obviously very keen and it is unfortunate that this year, for part of the evening at least, they were let down by their author.

ALAN WILSON.

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Stourbridge, Worcs.

An ingenious use of tape-recordings of music by the church choir was made during the production of the Passion Play *Redemption* in St. Thomas's Church, Stourbridge, during Holy Week. The play was of the usual high standard associated with the producer, the drama being heightened by the skilful colour grouping, lighting and music with which it was presented. It began in the darkened church, the only light being that shining on the Cross of an altar stripped of all ornaments. The story was unfolded in the chancel and Sanctuary where black and red steps made an

effective focal point. Striking contrast was made between beautifully spoken words from the Gospel by individual voices, and the violent movements, shouts and acclamations of the crowd which came surging from the body of the Church. The central Figure of the drama was always invisible, but His Voice was heard and His Presence was faithfully evoked by the players.

The difficulties of presenting a play of this size on a small stage were ingeniously overcome by using the whole of the church and obstacles were turned into assets to bring in a sense of audience participation in the horror of the Crucifixion and the joy of the Resurrection and Pentecost. To arrange twenty-four people on a stage seven feet six inches wide demanded stringent economy and planned imagination, yet every person was visible, and there was no feeling of drilled movement in the surging crowd. What was most apparent was a spontaneity and an obvious love which rang triumphant during the singing of the Nicene Creed, and made this annual Offering of a Passion Play sincere and moving.

O. M. W.

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Theatre Group Productions

It is the duty of Players to entertain. Twice within recent weeks (when T.G.P. visited the Elmhurst Ballet School, Camberley, during their Spring tour), I have sat in a lofty position overlooking stage and auditorium watching the players in action and their audience in re-action. The study was fascinating and rewarding. On the first occasion William Fry had directed Henri Ghéon's *The Way of the Cross*. He and his players did excellent well. Never afraid to play hard and strong, yet they never for a moment forgot Who was the Leading Man. So they were true evangelists—speaking with love of Love, as they exercised their craft with deceptively simple skill. It was clear that any who met the audience afterwards would take knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus.

On the second occasion Sylvia Read and William Fry offered, under E. Martin Browne's direction, *My Brother's Keeper*, the fourth in their Theatre Roundabout productions. Apart from the technical skill displayed, these programmes are an exhibition of no small feat of memory. The words of Dylan Thomas, Ibsen, Jane Austen, T. S. Elio and many others are spoken by the Actors, with one short interval in a programme which lasts for two hours Laughter and tears, anger and delight sweep almost passionately over the audience; and it comes as no shock nor is there any sense of loss of entertainment or of being " got at ", when i is realized that all concerned with the production have invoked the Holy Trinity as they set out to make it. The audience, on this occasion varying in age from thirteen years to seventy years were silenced (spellbound?) by the virtuosity of these players and the simplicity and skill of the production.

THE REV. JOHN MORTIMER.

* * *

Union Theological Seminary, New York

Two plays under the general title " A Little Leaven ".

The Talking Ass, written in 1960 (by John Heath-Stubbs), tells the Biblical story of Balaam and his ass. It is a witty and serious play, with a stag donkey (four human legs), brigh musical-comedy lighting, beautiful wild coloured costumes by Richard Casle and superb Broadway-style direction b Robert E. Seaver—though the Broadwa techniques were used to point up subtleties of the spirit and the flesh an of theological speculation not foun on Broadway (that is, south of 116th or north of 14th). The intimate know ledge of the Bible that goes into all th plays at the Seminary, and evokes roar from the young seminary students, i apt to be lost on a visitor from Without but enough good things come through The Angel of the Lord (in smoky yellow with sequins pasted on her forehead an around her eyes) and Balaam were particularly lucid, limber, lovely—youn acting at its best.

Judith, a new verse play by Ev McFall, another writer from England—theatrical literacy is too often a Britis subsidy in America—shows Judit meeting the Assyrian general Holofernes asking him to spare her village, whic he won't do, the learning to like him to love him; and finally she cuts off hi head, as in the Bible story. Judith wa a bit stiff, especially in a play incline to stiffness, and Holofernes did no provide the magnetism necessary, bu

ooked Judith up and down busily, like a horse trader. "I shall follow dark days in the hollow cave of years" and 'There's something of truth in it" did not come up to the language of Heath-Stubbs, whose every line, even "Mount your tractable ass!" as someone says to Balaam, has literary instincts, a good spider building a good web.

RUTH HERSCHBERGER.

(*by kind permission of "The Village Voice," New York*)

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Watford, Herts.

The Substitute, a modern-dress Passion play by Frank Williams, was produced by the Watford Repertory Company for a week in May 1961, the author himself playing the chief part. Professional companies rarely interest themselves in an openly "religious" play, and if it is agreeable to note the inclusion of such a play in the regular programme of a "rep.", it is even more so to record that the venture was a success, audiences during the week being both large and appreciative.

The play shows Barabbas, released from his death sentence and curious about the man who has taken his place, questioning eye-witnesses of the Crucifixion, and finally after much mental struggle attaining belief in the claims of Christ. The "modern dress" setting was simple and never so obtrusive as to be incongruous—such a setting raises great problems of detail if it is too specific (for example, if the Passion is happening today, what country are we in? and if Britain, how do you explain the barbarities of crucifixion? and who are Pilate and Caiaphas—the Prime Minister and the Archbishop?) These difficulties were avoided with great tact, and the effect of the contemporary clothes was curiously timeless.

I wish, in view of the circumstances, that it were possible to add that *The Substitute* is a good play; but as drama it has too many weaknesses. After the first act, which has theatrical shape and strength, it settles down to two plodding acts of interviews between Barabbas and various characters of the Gospel story, in which they narrate events offstage at painstaking length. Nor was I convinced by the group of disciples, who on the evening of Good Friday seemed remarkably well rehearsed as a helpful Mission team, or by Barabbas' conversion, which failed to ring true.

What did come over strongly in this production, however, was the author's affirmation of his own faith. It is never easy to pray, alone, on stage, and when the words are known to be the speaker's own, the effect is of a personal "giving one's testimony". As such, to audiences without much interest in religion who had come to see a well-known television player, *The Substitute* will have justified itself.

B. J.

* * *

St. Pancras

To the St. Pancras Deanery Players fell the distinction of giving the first London performance of Norman Nicholson's *Birth by Drowning*, in the Church Hall, College Place.

This play, not easy to produce or act, was tackled with energy and determination by the group, under the direction of Father Cordell, whose experience brought to the production all the necessary imagination, discipline and courage, resulting a convincing performance in which the story of Elisha and Naaman takes on the reality of contemporary life.

Bringing the events from their Old Testament setting to the Cumberland fells of today was a daring inspiration, further complicated by the personification of the Biblical mountains, Gebal, Gerizim and Gilboa, as the active guardians and guides of the people of God. They were effectively represented as three women in realistic green cloaks, whose somewhat acid commentary on the action sharpened the point of the play. These important parts well sustained throughout.

From these hills Elisha, as a wandering village doctor, draws his inspiration and upon them he sees the heavenly vision. For him the Voice of God echoes amongst the fells. This was a particularly good performance, as was also that of Naaman, the scornful captain of the enemy troops weaving their way guerilla-wise, in and out of the mist-wreathed hills and dales. Even in his despair he has no use for these people or their country, resenting such a prescription of humility as a wash in the local beck. "Are not Abana and Pharpar. . . .?" One can hear the

shrug as well as see it. Yet his subsequent transformation is equally complete. Naaman is indeed a new creature, born by immersion in the waters of God, a foretelling of our future baptismal regeneration.

Another interesting feature of the play is the presentation of Gehazi as the Shunamite's son, who has heard so often of the circumstances attendant on his restoration by Elisha that he continually dwells on them. "I sneezed seven times." It is his sole claim to importance, clearly brought out, with the quick twist of cupidity at the end.

Against a background of simple but sufficient scenery the Players combined to convey, by their sincere performance the great truths that God is no respecter of the politics of man: that human nature, regardless of place or period, always remains the same, but that God too is unchanging in His readiness and ability to bring every sinful soul to a new birth, using the most ordinary things of our common life as the channels of His grace.

K. L.

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